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Beyond the Sunset

FLORENCE VERINDER

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“BEYOND THE SUNSET”

AND OTHER VERSES

WITH TWO HISTORICAL PLAYS

ENTITLED

“MERCY, OR THE QUEEN OF A DAY”

AND

“TWO NATIONS”

By FLORENCE VERINDER



LONDON :

FREDK. VERINDER, 376, STRAND, W.C.

—
1903.

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PREFACE.

MANY of the verses contained in this little volume have already appeared in magazines or reviews, the majority of them in *The New Age*. The Authoress is indebted to the Editor of that paper for permission to print them in the present form.

In publishing the plays, she has been partly influenced by the assurances of one or two High School mistresses that such plays would prove useful for representation at school entertainments. "Mercy" and "Two Nations" were originally written—in the autumn of 1898 and 1899 respectively—for acting at private Christmas parties. The fact that almost all of those who took part in them were under seventeen years of age seems to shew that their performance in schools is not impracticable. Needless to say, their plots are entirely fictitious, but where real historical characters have been introduced the Authoress has to the best of her ability presented them faithfully.

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To my Father



BEYOND THE SUNSET.

A WEARY-hearted pilgrim, in a land
Of hate and falsehood, passing on his way,
Full sadly thought upon his dying hopes,
 And watched the dying day.
The sunset o'er the everlasting hills,
Rose-red and lily-white, its glory shed ;
The golden bars, that are the gate of Heav'n,
 Were touched with white and red.

The pilgrim, musing on his bitter wrongs,
And all this beauty, cried in his despair
(Dreaming that truth should never more prevail),
 " Would all things were as fair ! "
Then came there voices from the spirit world,
Where love is free, and every truth is clear ;
And spake some ancient words of comfort, which
 Pure souls alone can hear.

" Lift up thine eyes to the eternal hills,
Whence succour cometh ; and forbear to weep ;
For He that keepeth Israel and thee
 Shall slumber not nor sleep.
Lift up thine eyes ; a rose and lily wreath
Upon the mountain's lofty brow behold ;
Those roses and those lilies grow afar,
 Beyond those bars of gold.

" For Love is likened to a red, red rose ;
And Truth is as a lily, white as snow ;
And in the garden of Jerusalem
 Such fadeless flow'rets grow."
The voices ceased. The pilgrim went his way,
Delivered from the burden of despair.
There was no bitterness within his heart,
 For Love and Truth were there.

And ever, in the sickroom of the world,
 Where souls were starving, and where hearts
 were sore,
 For lack of their true food or medicine,
 The rose of Love he bore.
 So, likewise, when of slander and deceit,
 And foulest falsehood—such as marred his youth,—
 A soul fell sick, a lily's fragrance healed ;
 The lily's name was Truth.

The sickroom of the mighty world is vast,
 And there are many patients, many ills ;
 But we shall find a cure for all, above
 The everlasting hills.
 And seeking flow'rs of love and truthfulness,
 For sin-sick men, physicians oft behold,
 Not only fragrant gardens, but, beyond,
 A glimpse of streets of gold.

August 17th, 1899.

THE CHRIST-CHILD.

Not only o'er the fields of Bethlehem
 There hover heralds of the King of Kings ;
 The blue sky bending over all the earth
 Grows white with cloudy wings.

Unwilling are the angels to abide
 For ever in the long-time favoured East ;
 Lest any heart should sorrow midst the joy
 Of winter's gladdest feast.

One greeting to the sons of toil and strife
 They bear from David's city, far away—
 The sanctified of ages—"Peace to thee
 And all thy house to-day!"

The Eastern salutation ever sweet
Falls gently from the lips of friend and guest ;
But in the voices of the little ones
We seem to hear it best.

O ye that seek the Saviour, and would fain,
Like Simeon, clasp Him in a close embrace,
Be tender with the babes whose angels still
Behold His Father's face ;

That e'en as in the legend, one of old
Unwittingly a Royal Burden bears,
So ye, perchance, caressing them, may touch
The Christ-Child unawares.

Christmas, 1900.

THE CHRISTMAS ANGEL.

THE mournful Autumn now has passed away ;
The Summer's death creation weeps no more ;
But sees the herald of the Christmas Day,
A fair white angel, standing at the door ;
Who carries a message o'er land and sea
"Comrade and Friend, is it sunshine with
thee ?"

His words are full of sweetness and of truth ;
He serves a Baby in a manger-bed ;
He leads the aged to the land of youth
By pleasant pathways that they love to tread ;
And many a message, o'er land and sea,
He bears on his wings, and I send him to thee.

The earth is weary of her yearly toil
And heavy-hearted, for she longs for rest,
And Christmas to the children of the soil
Is ever welcome, and shall leave them blest ;
The blessing it brings, with bounty so free,
Comrade and Friend, may it linger with thee

Christmas, 1897.

A PARADISE.

(The Greek word for a park is "Paradeisos.")

A DAISY, in its humble place,
Looks up towards the summer skies,
And feels upon its heaven-turn'd face
Love's sunlight, from two soft, dark eyes,
That shine with wonder, "Child"—says he—
"How lowly and how glad are we!"

The lovely drooping tree which stands
Inside the park, too high to touch,
Bends down its tiny leafy hands
To meet the gentle clasp of such
Warm, chubby fingers; "Child"—says he—
"How innocent and glad are we!"

The skies above the fairy lake,
The baby's sea, grow dark and dim;
And through the peep-holes of the stars,
The dear kind angels smile at him,
A Paradise—a pasture sweet,
To the young children of the street!

October, 1902.

 DESERT FLOWERS.

LIGHT in a world of light,
Flowers where the flowers abound,
Stars on a starry night—
These die uncrowned.

Light in a world of shade,
Flowers in the desert plain,
Starlight but half displayed—
These live and reign.

Truth where the path is clear,
 Peace when our foes forbear,
 Love with our loved ones near—
 All these are fair.

Truth when our fears are great,
 Peace when our foes malign,
 Love in the midst of hate—
 These are divine.

August 30th, 1900.

THE DEEP-SEA CALM.

LAMB, in the clover-clad meadow,
 Calmly thy life-river flows ;
 Taking no thought for the morrow,
 What is thy need of repose ?

Lake, in the depths of the forest,
 Shaded and sheltered by trees,
 Scarcely a ripple disturbs thee :
 When hast thou fought with the breeze ?

Worker, the beautiful country
 Calls to the care-worn and pressed :
 "Come, I will shew you my beauty :
 Only the weary can rest."

Spirit and heart of the thinker,
 Battling with bondage, release
 Brings thee the calm of the ocean ;
 Only the storm-toss'd know peace.

September, 1900.

THE COUNCIL-ROOM OF KINGS.*

FROM her high Heaven, gentle Peace, descending
 To hear the love-song that creation sings,
 Fills with a beauty that is most transcending
 The council-room of kings.
 Her bow'r and palace, where she sits, receiving
 Such vows as slaves and lovers utter—nay!
 I had forgotten ; it is past believing !
 All this was yesterday.

A maiden, in the market-place, forsaken,
 Her arms outstretched towards the peaceful stars :
 " The life of none, my Father, have I taken,
 Nor followed after Mars.
 My words are Thine, but vainly they are spoken ;
 Humanity denies our plighted troth,
 And, with that sacred contract, there is broken
 The world's allegiance oath."

An angel stands beside her in the city ;
 He comes to bear her to her native skies ;
 Once more, upon her faithless ones, in pity,
 She turns her sad, sweet eyes.
 She says—" I will be gentle in my chiding ;
 Those who are noblest do not deal in scorn ;
 And, though these men may pass me now, deriding,
 I know they soon must mourn."

The daughter of the Highest is ascending ;
 Red ruin, in the council-room of kings,
 Usurps her throne ; but one or two are bending
 Before those angel wings.
 Perchance, the gentle child, who is their burden,
 Will turn again and listen to the pray'r
 Of those whose faithfulness is its own guerdon ;
 And we ourselves are there.

* Written when the question of Peace or War in S. Africa was hanging in the balance : with reference also to the then recent Hague Conference.

"Belovéd, have we wronged thee past forgiving?
When thy young trustfulness, undoubting, deigned
To hear our mortal vows without misgiving,

Not all of them were feigned.

A few cry 'shame' upon the false creation,
Though some, less noble than themselves to-day,
Salute thy rival; bear thou with this nation

A little while, we pray!"

Fair Peace her time of mercy is extending;
Red ruin, scarlet-robed, her crown awaits;
The footsteps of a thousand men are bending

Towards the palace gates:

Humanity, before the tyrant kneeling,
Is dumb; the flutter of an angel's wings
Fills with suspense and agonised appealing

The council-room of kings.

October 8th, 1899.

A NEW YEAR'S PROMISE.

THE little Christ-Child hath but come and gone
With Christmas; nay, He travels with us past
The turning in the road of time which parts

This era from the last.

He treads the thorny path of centuries
To show us midst the barren, joyless hours,
The places where there grow, between the stones,
His happy wayside flowers.

But soon will come the parting—the return,
And after that the lonely ages; nay;
We have this faithful promise—"I will be
Your Comrade all the way."

February, 1902.

“A LITTLE CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM.”

Suggested by the well-known Picture.

ONCE in the year, a little Child unguarded
Walks proudly through the stormy field of Mars,
His halo glorious as the rainbow crescent,
His raiment as ten thousand Christmas stars.

Once in a while, a little Child, restraining
Fierce Nature's warrior-spirit, floods with grace
The tiger glances of revenge, and softens
The outline of some hard unlovely face.

Once and again, a little Child, caressing
The heavy-laden toilers of the land,
Lays gently, where the yoke of pain is pressing
Some aching neck, a tender healing hand.

Once, at the last, a little Child doth tether
The lion with the lamb, and love constrain
Strong striving and sweet confidence together
To follow in the beauteous Vision's train.

Once in a life, if ne'er again repeating
His Christmas message, 'mid the joy-bells' peal,
A little Child stoops down and whispers greeting,
A starry hope illumines our Ideal.

Christmas, 1902.

“THE ETERNAL ARMS.”

“The Eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.”

SEE yonder, how those grand, majestic clouds
Stand upright, with the country at their feet—
Just on the border of the star-land, where
The earth and heaven meet

So mighty and so massive ! Surely they
 Could carry earthly care away, if fear
 Of the bright flaming background did not keep
 The world from drawing near.

And wherefore, when the splendour of the day
 Is passing, should the heart of mortal dread
 The beauty of the even, and the clouds
 Which form that downy bed ?

For truly they are nothing but a couch,
 Those greyish masses ; and the sunset glow
 Lies, like a gold and crimson coverlet
 Upon the sheets of snow.

O ! ye who keep your vigil with the stars,
 All through the weary night-time of unrest,
 Rise up, and seek your peace beyond the clouds
 Which gather in the West !

Be still, each heart ; nor let the ruddy flame,
 Which shines behind the whiteness, rouse alarms ;
 'Tis but the sign of One who stretches out
 His Everlasting Arms.

A fiery pillar, lighting, as of old,
 The road to Zion ; while the Spirit saith :
 " Come hither : I will comfort thee, as one
 His mother comforteth.

" Come hither : and beneath the cloudy sheets,
 Behind the rainbow curtains, time and space
 Unheeded, thou shalt meet thy loved and lost,
 Within My sweet embrace.

" And in My dreamland, surely thou shalt find
 The God Eternal, as the Prophet said,
 Thy Refuge ; and the Everlasting Arms
 Shall be beneath thy head."

April, 1902.

THE CHILDREN'S GARDENS IN SOUTH AFRICA.

IF earth be heaven's counterpart,
A firmament of flow'rs,
The rose—a full, warm sun at noon,
The lily—queenly as the moon,
May dwell in regal bow'rs.

But by the homely mealies lay
The children's gardens,* there
Shone many a tiny meadow star,
As common as the daisies are,
As common and as fair.

Their glory touch'd with love's own light
A farmer on whose breast
The first fruits of his children's ground,
With vows of sweet affection, found
The altar of their rest.

To-day, nor sun nor day star cheers
The lab'rer's hopeless toil ;
For lo ! the Desolation stands
Where willing work of little hands
Once sanctified the soil.

Yes, stands "where it ought not," and deals
Cold death, though God gave life ;
The forest and the veldt bemoan
Green boughs cut down, 'mid sigh and groan,
By war's sharp pruning knife.

But for those starry blossoms most
The father's heart is sore ;
With them, he evermore must miss
The fragrance of a baby's kiss,
Which was and is no more.

* It is supposed that each of the farmer's children has a little piece of the garden for his own, as in some English families.

O ! ye who nip the long-watched bud,
 Nor think that children's sobs
 Rise upward, know, with bitter pain,
 For patient labour spent in vain,
 The pulse of Nature throbs.

O corn that cannot ripen now !
 O children's gardens drear !
 O bleeding loveliness of earth !
 Cry to your Gardener—your Birth !
 Cry out, and He will hear !

July, 1902.

HEARTSEASE.

WE greet thee, stranger year ! We cannot sing
 Light-hearted welcomes ; but with longing eyes
 We look toward thee, trusting thou wilt bring
 Some comfort from the skies.

The seekers after righteousness are sad ;
 Thy brother year, who is to-day no more,
 Delayed their work. His errors are behind ;
 Thy life-work lies before.

Thy life-work, to undo a cruel wrong,
 To banish the injustice hatred brings,
 And call the angel Truth to earth again
 With healing in her wings.

Thy life-work—to chastise the sons of strife,
 But tenderly, so that the summer dew
 (Which washeth dust-soiled daisies pure again,
 And maketh all things new)

Shall fall not gentler than repentant tears
 On blood-stained hands ; and, on the blood-stained
 sod

Thus purified, perchance we yet may kneel
 And stretch them forth to God.

And, maybe, from that very earth, shall spring
 Sweet heartsease for the dear ones of the slain,
 And heartsease for a most heroic soul,*
 That wrongly suffered pain.

Not laurel and the glory of the world ;
 Not willow, weeping o'er the men that fall ;
 But myrtle for the Baby Prince of Peace,
 And heartsease for us all.

New Year, 1900.

FORGET-ME-NOTS.

HE made His angels spirits ; and our eyes
 Are only mortal : yet it sometimes seems
 As if the very darkness cannot hide
 The angel of our dreams.

I know not wherefore, but she ever is
 A woman, in a robe of snowy white,
 Decked with the starry gems of Heaven : veiled
 In moonbeams' softest light :

Crowned with forget-me-nots ; and in her hands
 Forget-me-nots ; and round about her feet
 The same blue flow'rs of love and faithfulness,
 To make remembrance sweet.

Remembrance—for she is not wholly strange
 This angel, with her tenderness and grace.
 The fairness of our best beloved ones
 Is shining in her face.

The brightest beauty—not of one alone :
 A mingling, maybe, of the truest worth
 Of all we hold most gentle, most divine,
 Upon the wide, wide earth.

* Dreyfus.

She lifts the veil that hangeth o'er her face :
 We know that we should fear no other loss
 So much as her's : upon her forehead lies
 The imprint of a cross.

She speaks : the sweetest tones we ever heard
 Come back again, like music ; and her breath
 Is laden with the kisses of a friend :
 " Forget-me-not," she saith.

" For all men have ideals, varied as
 The many-coloured waters of a spring
 That mirrors sunshine. I am thine ; and each
 Is something like the King.

And each is leading upwards, and beyond
 The cloud-land, by a pathway of her own,
 To lay her garland of forget-me-nots
 Before the great, white throne."

May, 1900.

NIGHT LABOURERS.

THE sunbeams lie imprisoned in the East,
 Cloud-guarded still ; and through the work-room
 door,

Dim shadows fall on the half-finished tasks
 Despairing age has cast upon the floor ;

While all the needy nations seek for men
 To carry on these labours and to make
 Before the morning, rare and precious things,
 For conscience and their fellow-creatures' sake.

Young Singer, train thine angel gifts of voice
 And music, till they reach their glory's height ;
 Be David to the sick and sin-possessed,
 And Gabriel to the watchers of the night.

Young Artist, if the Hands that paint the skies
 Upon thy soul fair lines of beauty trace,
 Strive, even in earth's darkened studio,
 To make a perfect picture for thy race ;

Young Workmen, with your tools, whate'er they
 be,
 Toil nobly at your great Employer's plan ;
 And, till the Sun of Righteousness arise,
 Give freely of your best to God and Man.

January, 1902.

THE SUMMER LAND.

FAIR Eden's gates were robed in angry flame,
 And Summer, who was wont to cast a veil
 Of brightest sunbeams o'er the garden's face,
 Departed, wan and pale.

He trod the desert with a soundless step,
 For grief goes softly, and he journeyed then
 To take farewell of those he once had blest,
 The fallen sons of men.

The perfect Summer in the summer land,
 Had known no Autumn and no herald Spring ;
 Unceasingly, his sun had beautified
 Each gladsome, living thing.

But now he felt the chilling wind of sin,
 And shuddered, crying to the sons of earth :
 "I cannot live in such a clime as this ;
 I leave you to your dearth.

"For yonder is my homeland. I was made
 To gladden hearts as well as brighten skies ;
 To-day, betwixt my happiness and you,
 Your mists of falseness rise.

"I cannot give my blossoms and my birds
To dwell for ever in your desert wild;
But sometimes, for your comfort, they shall come,
With Spring, my joyous child.

"And I, myself, each year will visit you,
Abide awhile, and former joys recall;
Until ye reach the land where summer days
Are followed by no Fall.

"Here, ye shall only see my outward grace;
When ye have passed your winter-time of pain,
In our new country, Nature and your souls
Shall harmonise again.

"Before that Eden's gates no flaming sword
Shall ever stand, to witness to our fall;
Perchance, no angel, but a higher One,
The Father of us all."

September 21st, 1899.

THE TOMB AND THE ROSE.

(From the French of Victor Hugo.)

"O Love-flower," said the tomb one day,
"Refreshing tears the morning gave;
What makest thou of these, I pray?"
The rose of whom he asked it said:
"With those thy ever-yawning cave
Receives from earth, what dost thou, grave?"

"O gloomy tomb," the rose again
Made answer, "—where the shadows lie,
A honeyed, amber scent I drain
From these same flow'rs"; there came reply:
"Sad flow'r, I form for realms divine
An angel, from each soul of mine."

Summer, 1901.

THE COUNTRY OF THE WORLD.

THERE came another Arthur from across the
 crystal sea ;
 The nations, thinking that his heart was free,
 Rejoiced, for each one thought that in the battle
 he would wear
 Her favour, and defend her cause ; but though
 their words were fair,
 He pass'd them by, and would not heed their
 prayer.

They dreamt not he had left his love across the
 crystal sea,
 No Guinevere, but one more pure than she ;
 To whom he vowed a deathless vow, that he
 would never fight
 For prejudice, or pride of race, but only for the
 right ;
 That all men should be equal in his sight.

And she was Truth Eternal, but the Nations
 knew her not,
 And some against her stainless knight did plot ;
 But he was strong and pure in heart, without
 reproach or shame,
 And won by deeds of chivalry such everlasting
 fame
 That evil sought the shelter of his name.

Yet, wheresoe'er, for God and Truth, the people's
 blood was shed,
 Sir Justice paused to succour them, and said :—
 "I deem this battlefield to-day the country of my
 birth ;
 Be true, lest I, to-morrow, seek a flag of greater
 worth ;
 For I am the free citizen of Earth."

He knows not any country, save the universal land,
 This knight, who still doth linger on our strand :
 He comes not from the Eastern shore ; he dwells
 not in the West ;
 The widest fatherland of all by Justice is possess'd ;
 And many colours mingle in his crest.

So vainly at each other cast the nations stones of
 scorn
 And hatred, in the world where all were born ;
 For he who holds the pledge of Truth, which she
 will surely claim,
 Is true to her, and counteth race nor nobleness,
 nor shame,
 But " citizen of earth " the highest name.

And, maybe, she will welcome him, across the
 crystal sea,
 On that great peace-day that is yet to be ;
 When Justice needs no weapon, and Excalibur is
 hurl'd
 To the forgetful ocean, and the war-flags are
 unfurl'd
 No longer, in the Country of the World.

October, 1899.

THE BATTLE OF LIFE.

THE heart of man full passionately cried :—
 " My love shall live, and all my foemen fall."
 But Love made answer :—" Am I not world-wide ?
 I am not thine until thou lovest all."

So man went forth his inmost wrongs to slay,
 In earth's fair morning ; and he fighteth yet ;
 But he shall come, and his dead hatreds lay
 At Love's own feet, before the sun has set.

July 25th, 1901.

THE HOLY LAND OF LOVE.

BETWEEN the rugged hills of Palestine,
 With all the terrors of their lonely caves,
 The happy vales take refuge from the storm
 The shelt'ring hillside braves.

A passing angel, in the olden days,
 Bent swiftly from an over-hanging rock,
 And touched a boy, who slept beneath its shade,
 Unmindful of his flock.

And when the shining monitor had joined
 The sweet Hosanna choir, regretful pain
 Led that young peasant up the rocky way,
 To find his sheep again.

Behind the ghostly outline of the hills,
 The moon sank down, and sinking seemed to die ;
 But soon there was no need of sun or moon,
 In such a radiant sky.

Where, dimming Northern Lights or Evening
 Star,
 A sudden glory shewed the pathway steep ;
 And struggling through the undergrowth and
 thorns,
 The shepherd found his sheep.

* * *

Still, from the sleep of selfishness and ease,
 The Christmas angel, passing to and fro,
 Awakes some soul to duty, with the touch
 Of long, long years ago.

And bids it, in the holy land of love,
 Tread on the stones of sacrifice, and thus
 Come presently to Him Who is not far
 From any one of us.

E'en now, upon the heights of Bethlehem,
 Full many a weary climber gladly yields
 For guidance to the Christmas bells which ring
 In far Elysian fields.

O'er ruthless rocks and caverns of despair,
 The starry deeds of heroes dimly shine ;
 Till, from behind the hardness of the age,
 Breaks forth the light divine ;

And then the struggling seeker after peace
 Sees footmarks where the Christ-Child's heralds
 trod ;

And struggling through a wilderness of wrongs,
 He finds the Lamb of God.

Christmas, 1901.

THE CLIFFS OF DOVER.

WHITE cliffs of Dover, pyramids of time,
 No sepulchres of proud Egyptian kings,
 But mounds of tiny creatures, that the tide
 From the wild ocean brings.

White columns, crown'd with chapiters of green,
 Stonehenge's forbears, born of ancient sands ;
 Grand roofless temple raised to the Unseen,
 But not by human hands.

Built, like all noble things, by sacrifice
 Of life and labour, for the heirs of time ;
 What if the future call yon deep-sea dust
 Akin to the sublime ?

Small atoms reach their zenith height in death,
 Embalm'd in Nature's bosom, to record
 Weird tales of continents by savage beasts
 And giant men explor'd.

White witness heap, there grind thy walls in vain
 Rough stones and shingle, never resting mills ;
 "There shall be no more sea " ; we are not told,
 There shall be no more hills.

O Castle, heirloom of the Norman kings,
 O Cæsar's Pharos, midst the shrubs around
 Your strongholds, have ye not one burning bush ?
 Have ye no holy ground ?

Night on the cliffs : a greater sun than ours
 Shines in dim space, a far-off flickering spark ;
 May not the Soul lie bare to Heav'n, beneath
 A canopy of dark ?

Fair fleecy clouds which children love to call
 White wings of angels, answer : Do ye screen
 The glory of the ancient Mercy-Seat ?—
 Shall it no more be seen ?

O Spirit, like the wind across the sea,
 Sweep o'er me, through Thy temple of the air ;
 O Thou to Whom all flesh shall come, behold
 I lift up hands of prayer.

Summer, 1902.

A PRAYER :

(From one of the "Ships that pass in the Night.")

O NOBLE Ship, that passest silently,
 Thy clear, true lanterns calmly turned on me,
 Would I might stay thee, but my hands are held,
 And may not signal thee.

O tyrant Custom, loose my pinion'd arms !
 I vainly struggle, in a storm of pain ;
 The distant lights grow dimmer ; let me send
 One message o'er the main !

O God of time and tide, *my* voice, *my* boat,
 Are pow'rless 'gainst the cruel sea of Fate !
 Change *Thou* the ruthless wind of circumstance,
 Before it be too late.

February, 1903.

THE HEART OF THE EARTH.

BLOW the winds, beat the waves and the storm ;
 Earth is calm on the surface, and still ;
 And its face is the face of a man
 Whence emotion is banished by will.

Leap the flames in its bosom ; like prayers,
 Would its waters roll up to the sky ;
 For its heart is the heart of a man
 Where tumultuous passions surge high.

July 3rd, 1903.

THE SEA OF YEARS :

A Prayer.

Thou mighty Keeper of the lighthouse Hope,
 That watches o'er the stormy sea of years,
 Have pity when we cannot see Thy light,
 Because our eyes are blinded by our tears.

Have pity when our little bark of good
 Is drifting to destruction unawares ;
 Have pity when the storm-waves of untruth
 Are overwhelming us, and no one cares.

Have pity when injustice like a fog
 Surrounds us, and, more reckless than afraid,
 We strike upon the rock of hopelessness ;
 Send Faith, Thy surest lifeboat, to our aid.

December, 1899.

LOVE AND LABOUR.

A little Lyric.

Flow on, bright streamlet, o'er
 Those stones thou fearest ;
 Foul is the stagnant pond ;
 Running water is clearest.

Toil on, strong lab'rer, though
 Little thou gleanest ;
 Work hath no time for wrong ;
 Active hands are the cleanest.

Love on, faint heart, despite
 Pain thou endurest ;
 Dark is the callous soul ;
 Loving hearts are the purest.

July 14th, 1903.

SOUL-FREEDOM.

Never more nigh
 Moves the bound ocean to the boundless sky
 For all its tossing : yet the ships that mow
 The surface cannot rule the depths below,
 Cannot forbid the yearning sea to throw
 Its love's free billows high.

Ever as far
 Grows the poor field-flow'r from the shining star ;
 Yet when its radiance reaches earth, the weed,
 Too trivial for the glorious thing to heed,
 Lies in its path and on its light doth feed ;
 Whose passage none can bar.

Autumn, 1903.

“MERCY, OR
THE QUEEN OF A DAY”:

A STORY OF THE COMMONWEALTH.



“MERCY.”

Dramatis Personæ.

MAURICE PERCIVAL	-	-	<i>A Cavalier.</i>
JEREMIAH-PUT-NOT-YOUR-TRUST- IN-PRINCES SMITH	-	-	<i>One of Cromwell's Ironsides.</i>
PAUL	-	-	<i>Jeremiah's Son.</i>
A CHILD	-	-	<i>Grandchild to Cromwell.</i>
JOHN MILTON	-	-	<i>Latin Secretary to Cromwell.</i>
OLIVER CROMWELL	-	-	<i>Lord High Protector.</i>
DIANA STUART	-	-	<i>A soi-disant sorceress.</i>
MERCY STUART	-	-	<i>A Puritan maiden, granddaughter to Diana.</i>

PERIOD—The Commonwealth (after 1653).

ACT I. Interior of a small house.

ACT II. A lane, near a garden.

ACT III. A room in Whitehall Palace, through the window of which Charles I. passed, on his way to execution.

ACT I.

Night. A small room; a bed, partly hidden behind a curtain.
MERCY alone, sewing.

Mercy (sings). “Freedom! Freedom! Thou wast a
light in the distance,
Dimly burning, flickering in the blast;
Now, O Freedom! thou dost illumine existence:
Guide us, light us, e’en when the night is past.”

Knocking is heard at the door.

Hath she returned so early ? 'Tis her wont
 To linger till the morning draweth nigh,
 Feigning to read her fortunes in the sky.
 It cannot be that she hath come so soon,
 Who never goes to rest before the moon.

Enter Jeremiah, with a child in his arms.

Why, 'tis a stranger, at this time o'clock !

Jer. I heard true-hearted singing, and did knock,
 There was no answer, mistress, so I came
 Unbidden, to implore thee, in the name
 Of Pity, England and the Commonwealth,
 To give us of thy house-room ; for the health
 Of one small child, committed to our care,
 Might suffer greatly from the bleak night air.

Mercy. This modest mansion's mistress I await,
 Whose secret pastime hath detained her late.
 And I myself can render scanty aid,
 If evil chance hath placed the little maid
 In need of nurse's skill.

She takes the child.

Jer. Still thine alarm :
 There hath befallen her no kind of harm,
 I do but ask that thou in safety keep,
 While, wearied by her journey, she doth sleep,
 Lord Cromwell's daughter's fairest youngest child.

Mercy. The Lord Protector's grandchild ! Take her
 back !
 Not that the baby doth a welcome lack
 From me, whose heart and weak but willing hand
 Were ever with the saviours of the land.
 And yet I ask thee—pray thee, bear her hence,
 And, of thy charity, tell no man whence
 This warning comes ; for verily I grieve
 To tell thee, but it is not safe to leave
 In such a place as this, on such a night,
 The child of such a one, in such a plight.

Jer. And wherefore? Is there treason hidden here?
Thou dost not look a traitress. Wherefore fear
For one brief night, with thy protecting arm.
To shield a sleeping innocent from harm?

Mercy. Another than myself—I cannot speak
More plainly—on the child might vengeance wreak.

Jer. Is it affection or a guilty shame
That keeps thy lips from uttering a name?

Mercy. 'Tis neither. 'Tis my will. I will not tell.

Jer. Will nothing force thee?

Mercy. Soldier, it were well
That thou, as one of Cromwell's Ironsides,
Remember there is nothing else, besides
Thy truth, so worthy thee as courtesy,
Therefore, I do beseech thy clemency
To ask no further question.

Jer. One I must.
Thine anxious care of us impels my trust.
If thou art loyal, as I think thou art,
Why then with traitors dost thou take thy part?
Thou art a jackal in the eyes of men
Who find thee dwelling in the jackal's den.
No answer, maiden? I do wish thee well.
Is it thou wilt not or thou canst not tell?

Mercy. For kinship's sake I would not, if I could.
For very shame I could not, if I would.

Jer. Maiden, farewell. There is no time to tarry,
Seeing my master's grandchild I must carry
Where danger threatens not, nor rebel sword.

Mercy. Oh hush! She sleeps. Disturb her not.
The Lord
Will watch her slumbers. Do not yet depart.
'Tis a sweet babe, I cannot bring my heart
To part with her.

Jer. Yet it will bring her pain,
According to thy words, if she remain.
Canst tell me of a friendly mansion near,
Where I may lodge her, without cause for fear?

Mercy. There is no shelter for full twenty miles.
Oh! see how sweetly in her sleep she smiles.

Jer. Stop thou thy woman's prattle. I am vex'd
At all this lingering. What folly next
Will serve thy purpose to prolong delay?
Give me the little one, or let her stay!

Mercy. The night is cold. The danger is not yet.
I choose to keep her. I do not forget
The reasons which I told thee of before,
Why I should close to thee this refuge-door.
But I have pondered and have found a way
To ward off perils of a doubtful fray,
If evil threaten.

Jer. I do trust thee, yet—

Mercy. That "yet" hath not the sound of perfect
trust.

Jer. I doubt thy power to turn away the thrust,
If swords are lifted 'gainst this infant life.

Mercy. Put not too strong a meaning on my words,
I said there *might* be, not there *would* be swords;
And I myself, stern soldier, understand,
'Gainst Cromwell's House will never raise my hand.

Jer. Peril from others—

Mercy. Nay, there shall be none.
I answer for her safety. Be thou gone.
Command our servants: they are thine to-night.
When morning breaketh then prepare for flight.

Exit Jeremiah. *Mercy lays the child on the bed.*

Mercy (alone). "When morning breaketh" danger
draweth nigh.

I read no omen in the starry sky,
 But only beauty, and I speak no charm
 Desiring, hoping to create some harm.
 And yet, to-night, if there be any spell
 In swaying other minds for good, 'twere well
 I own, for once, the name she giveth me,
 And use a borrowed pow'r, protecting thee,
 O Freedom's daughter! Gentle child, good-night!
 I shield thee from a too unfriendly light.

She draws the curtain.

Wake not. Thy parentage I will not wrong
 By lulling thee with aught but freedom's song.
 (*Sings.*) "Freedom! Freedom! Thou wast a light in
 the distance,
 Dimly burning, flickering in the blast;
 Now, O! freedom, thou dost illumine existence;
 Guide us, light us, e'en when the night—

Enter Diana. She approaches Mercy angrily.

Diana. Singing thy trait'rous rebel songs again!
 Be silent; lest I use my magic art
 To blast each hope of thine ungrateful heart,
 To curse thee and thy purposes, each day
 Of life, and keep thee ever far away
 From what thy sire bequeathed thee, that great throne
 Which thou hast never looked on as thine own.
 Say not thou would'st not gain it. England hath
 Full many maidens, fairer far than thee,
 More fit for royalty; not one, I ween,
 Would murmur at the chance of being queen.

Mercy. Those who are faithful to the common good
 Would scarce be tempted by a pretty name,
 For that is all. The kingly pow'r is dead.
 England doth rule herself. Her noblest sons
 Hold office in the state, in trust for her.
 She hath (alas! that she was forced to use
 Such fearful means to gain so fair an end!)
 Put down the perjured and dishonoured man.

Diana. My husband's brother, "that dishonoured man"!

Charles Stuart, thy great-uncle, laying down
His royal head upon these butchers' block!
Call'st thou that righteous? Dost rejoice at that?

Mercy. Grandmother, no! That was not charity.
Perchance, they might have found a gentler way;
Perchance, they could not. This I say to thee:
Charles Stuart, king, to him I owe no tears:
Charles Stuart, man, I cannot but despise;
(He lost his honour long before the men
He mocked and played with made him lose his life;)
But to Charles Stuart, kinsman, warms my heart;
I was but eight years old, else had I gone,
When he was all forsaken and alone,
True daughter of his house, to comfort him.

Diana. What is thy pity worth, if thou withhold
Thine admiration? I have worked for thee,
All night for thee have searched the book of fate,
Created charms to bless and curse for thee.

Mercy. Oh! that thou would'st not!

Diana. Nay, I can and will.
What, art thou weary of thy watchings, wench?
'Tis good that thou should'st wait and learn to care,
And know the greatness of thy future state,
And fit thyself to bear thy royal name.
Mortals with mighty destinies must work,
And merit thus the glory of their fate.
But oft the work brings danger. Turn not pale,
Thou daughter of the kings! And do not say
A maiden, and a woman long since grey,
Can never raise the country. Many still,
If thou wilt lift the sceptre and command,
Are ready to obey and do thy will.
And, though these fail thee, I have pow'r enough,
(A pow'r which thou, Regina, can'st not have!)
To turn the very hearts of men to thee;

To break the weapons of thine enemy ;
 To lead thy foes into captivity ;
 To cause all kinds of obstacles to be
 Of no account, to vanish from thy way ;
 And so to lead thee on to victory.
 This is my magic. This is what I learn
 While others sleep, and thou art murmuring
 Because I tarry ! Now thou knowest all.
 Choose, and be wise. Have done with fallacies.
 Look to thy rights ; for, let the Parliament
 Do what it will, thy grandsire was a prince.

Mercy. His marriage was a secret, and he died
 Before his father, and his brother Charles
 Hath sinned and suffered since. I would not be
 A second Lady Jane. I grieve for thee,
 That thou hast built such mighty hopes on me.

Diana. This once, before I curse, I will entreat.
 Pause thou, and hear me. Mercy, is thy name
 A mockery—or art thou merciful ?
 Wilt thou be merciful to all my hopes
 And kind to all my strivings ? Wilt thou give
 A sweet consent to all I do for thee ?
 What I believe thee wilt thou truly be ?
 And wilt thou say in confidence to me
 What from the housetops they shall soon proclaim—
 “I, Mercy Stuart, do assert my claim
 To England’s throne, and promise to maintain
 The laws. I also do forbid, on pain
 Of death, that any person in the land
 To him or his shall lend a helping hand
 —That great arch-traitor, Cromwell.” Say but this
 And I will greet thee with my homage-kiss.

Mercy. Not for a thousand crowns, a thousand thrones,
 Can I forget that homage must not pass
 From all to one, save to a hero-king,
 The chosen of the people, for his grace,
 His nobleness, his service to the world.
 And such there are not now. I would there were.
 There is no birthright. Shall a tyrant reign

O'er noble men, and crush them to the earth,
 Because, forsooth! he is of royal birth?
 If I am harsh, forgive me. Chide me now,
 But not too cruelly. I still must cling
 To those with whom my heart has ever been.

Diana. No more! No more! A plague on all the
 thoughts
 Which keep thee from fulfilling my desires!
 May nothing prosper thou dost undertake!
 May foes encompass thee and friends forsake!
 Paths full of danger may thy footsteps take!
 May waves of sorrow ever o'er thee break!
 And now, may sad thoughts keep thee long awake!
 I go to rest.

She goes towards the bed and draws the curtain.

What traitor's child is this?
 What trick is this?

Mercy. Nay, she hath done no harm.
 O'er her, I pray thee, breath no evil charm.
 I could not speak the words thou didst demand,
 For I myself should break my own command,
 To succour one so sweet and undefiled.
 O pity! It is Cromwell's daughter's child.

She clings entreatingly to Diana.

Diana. No fitter one in all the land to pay
 For all that I have suffered. Wench, away!

She fumbles in the bosom of her dress, as if for a weapon. Mercy stands between her and the bed upon which the child is lying, and holds her back.

Mercy. Thou giv'st commanding pow'r. Stand back!
 I take
 Unwished-for honours, for my namesake's sake.
 Thou dost believe my sov'reign right. Beware!
 This child is under my protecting care.
 I claim obedience! Thou'lt regret, I ween,
 That, for one moment, I am truly queen!

Curtain.

ACT II.

A lane near a garden gate. MAURICE PERCIVAL and DIANA STUART walking to and fro.

Diana. Speak hopefully, if thou fall in with her,
And give her cause for laughter, if thou canst,
When there is little merriment abroad,
And things progress so slowly. Bid her care;
She careth far too little. Bid her work—
Work for her cause, that all may yet be well.
Bid her take heart; but, while exhorting thus,
Forget not she's a Stuart and a queen.

Maur. Princess, I hear thee; and the widow of
Prince Henry, eldest son of good King James,
Hath all the homage that a man may keep
From her who is his sov'reign. I obey.

Diana. Tell her, as she is listless, I must act;
And in her name I have a council called,
Of some few men who will support her claim,
To meet this very night, at stroke of twelve,
In that poor dwelling, now unworthy us,
In this our altered rank (or rather, rank
Acknowledged, for we are but what we were).

Maur. I would that more did bow themselves to her.
They must, ere we proclaim her to the world,
Lest we be scoffed at, lest we fall a prey
To those stern men who make the land to-day
Void of all pleasure, who, on sadness bent,
Keep all the year a never-ending Lent.

Diana. Say all these things to those who know them
not,
But now proceed to present business.

Maur. Indeed I will. We must both pick our men,
And choose a time for action. Not till then
Can we of aught or anyone be sure.

As to the first : think'st thou they will endure
 The Lady Mercy's too uncaring mien ?
 They love enthusiasm that is seen.
 They love a goddess that will hear their prayers.
 They love a queen who for their homage cares.

Diana. I blame them not. I know that it is true.
 And Mercy longtime will her coldness rue
 If it doth cool their ardour. I regret
 She hath so little real pow'r, as yet.
 But they will win it for her ; and, meanwhile,
 She should reward their efforts with her smile,
 That they may strive the harder, and forgive
 That she, as yet, hath nothing else to give.

Maur. What of the time for rising ? I rejoice
 That ye are ready now to make your choice.
 Too long hath loyal England silence kept !
 Too long have Royalists in secret wept !
 Now we can lift our heads, and conquering come
 To take possession of our ancient home.
 A Stuart maiden, winning back her own,
 Shall sit once more upon her fathers' throne.
 One thing I tell thee :—Shun the fatal day,
 Third of September, when there fell a prey
 To him whom many Englishmen obey
 Two mighty armies : when our wish was crost,
 Dunbar and Worcester being fought and lost.

Diana. Thanks for thy warning, though it comes too
 late
 To change our plans. We cannot fight with fate.
 Two days ago, from London town, there came
 One of our number. Speaking in the name
 Of those supporters whom he left behind,
 He said that the authorities were blind,
 And all went well. If things are still the same,
 The third day of September, they proclaim,
 Where Charing Cross doth terminate the Strand,
 My grandchild Mercy queen of all the land.
 We, too, are bound to act ; and yet I know,
 After thy words, I would not have it so.

Maur. That it hath chanced like this, I am much grieved
 And troubled in my mind. Although I say
 That Cromwell's happy is our hapless day,
 'Tis only that I think the people's hearts
 Would fail them at the thoughts that day imparts,
 And they would fight less hopefully. Maybe,
 Some would feel surer of security
 If this thing could be changed. Are ye so sworn
 That none may seek to move you or to warn?

Diana. We are so sworn that naught can stop us now,
 Except betrayal,—therefore, I must bow
 To what, in irony, the fates have sent
 To hinder me; whose greedy eyes were bent
 On such great glory that my sight was dazed,
 And I so lost my senses, as I gazed,
 That I did honour one who never gave
 Aught but her scorn to those whom I enslave
 (The magic charms which tend to make her great),
 Aught but derision, unbelief and hate
 To those I serve or perish—spirit pow'rs,
 That work their pleasure in the ev'ning hours.

Maur. What meanest thou? For if within thy heart
 Are evil thoughts, I will not take my part
 With such as thou art! If thou dost not seek
 To lose my service and good wishes, speak.

Diana. I have dark masters, whom thou knowest not.

Maur. Then I abjure thee! There shall be no blot
 On what I do for this most noble cause:
 No fancied breaking of creation's laws.
 It is but fancied. Woman, thou art mad,
 If thou imagine that thou hast or had
 Unusual pow'rs. Nay—rather thou dost lack
 Thy reason; and thy madness is so black
 That those who smile and point at it with scorn
 Must turn away and shudder, while they mourn
 That things like this are possible. Depart!
 And take this truth to thy untruthful heart:
 There is no magic in the earth or sky;

There is no magic in the ocean waves ;
 No magic word which raiseth men on high :
 There is no magic which destroys or saves ;
 There is no magic in the bounds of space :
 No magic in the history of time,
 Save that of innocence, and love, and grace,
 Which turneth such as thou art from their crime.

Mercy is seen coming towards them.

Diana. Traitor ! thy queen approacheth. Turn and
 flee,
 And hide thy false face in obscurity.

Maur. Flee from the Lady Mercy ? Nay, not so.
 I count not that I less allegiance owe
 That I no more can fight for her. I ween
 She is not less entirely my heart's queen,
 Because a knowledge I have gained from thee
 Hath taught me, it is better far to be
 Obedient to a stern man, meaning well,
 Than build a kingdom worse than that which fell,
 With real or with fancied aid from hell.
 When thou hast gone, and left the air more pure,
 I will confess my treason, and endure,
 From the most royal of thy royal race,
 Hard thoughts, hard words, with a much better grace
 Than thy most sweet caresses.

Diana. Speak me fair.
 I go. Mercy, forget not ! Have a care !

Exit Diana.

Maur. I greet thee and salute thee, gentle queen.

Mercy. Why, Maurice Percival, my general,
 Of treachery a sov'reign should not hear.
 If thou hast found a better cause than mine,
 I call thee not a traitor. Follow it.
 Thou would'st be traitor to thine honour, friend,
 In giving me the service of thy sword,
 Now that thy heart is on the other side.

Maur. If thou hast heard all, lady, thou dost know
My reasons. Many men will call me false.

Mercy. But I have weighed thee in my honour scales
And found thee true indeed. I would I were
As true as thou art, Maurice, and as free !

Maur. But thou art queen !

Mercy. There lies my misery.
Not e'en half false, half true, but wholly false
Am I this day to all my heart hath loved.
And yet, no more of this ! I have been wrong
To let thee know so much, and there is one
Will wreak her vengeance, if thou dost betray.

Maur. That I will not. I am thy servant still.
Tell me thy sorrow, lady, and thy will.

She attempts to go, but he detains her.

Nay, do not leave me yet.

Mercy. I dare not stay.
Know'st thou Diana is my grandmother ?
And hast thou heard her rave or even worse,
As I have, Maurice, hast thou heard her curse ?
I do so fear her that I scarce dare speak.
She calls me queen, and yet I am as weak
As any child, when she doth raise her voice
Against my wishes, and I have no choice
But to surrender and to keep the peace.
I would to God this tyranny might cease !

Maur. Now I am certain thou dost suffer wrong,
And, queen or simple maiden, thou shalt tell,
That I may aid thee ; for my arm is strong ;
Therefore, I conjure thee, unfold thy woe.

Mercy. Bound by that hasty word she wrung from me
To save a young child from her cruelty,
I am what I have never wished to be.
Well know I many daughters of the earth

Rejoice and glory in their royal birth.
 But I have never done so. I have been
 A traitress, ever since I was a queen.
 I had been firm so long. She did entreat :
 I heard her not. I was so glad and proud
 To answer all the charges she could bring
 Against the Commonwealth. She threatened me,
 And less than nothing did I care for that.
 I was so happy in my conscious truth.
 Then she grew mad with fury, and her wrath
 Fell on another object than myself—
 And one so innocent of any wrong,
 That I took queenship for compassion's sake,
 Claiming allegiance for a moment's space,
 Not knowing what would follow ; thinking I
 Had awed her anger by my sov'reignty :
 Not dreaming she had triumphed, after all,
 And made of those impulsive words, the links
 Of the great iron chain she binds me with.
 Maurice, come nearer. I am glad thou know'st,
 And I am glad (this I must whisper low)
 That thou hast learnt what I did once uphold,
 That right is with Lord Cromwell's Commonwealth,
 That thou dost go to those I used to love.
 No longer we are comrades. Thou wilt hear
 If I succeed or fail. If I succeed,
 Some men will call me "sov'reign." I would give
 Half of the years that I have yet to live,
 That some might call me "sister " once again
 To whom I am a rebel ! If I fail,
 It will be well that thou dost leave me now.

Maur. Had I known this before, by my good sword,
 A dozen Lord Protectors might have slain
 A dozen kings, and I should not have cared !
 I leave thee, and I will not mock thee now
 With homage that is worthless in thine eyes.

Mercy. True homage should be given to the best,
 And I do not deserve it. But I take
 A kind farewell of thee, for friendship's sake.

For comrade-love is worth a thousand crowns.
Give me thy hand, and do not shrink away,
I am not faithless by my own decree.

Maur. Not faithless, but too faithful ! Fare thee well !

He stoops and kisses her hand. Exit.

Mercy. Not faithless, but too faithful ! Is it so ?
Have my two duties, pulling either way,
Destroyed my judgment ? Have I bound myself,
Or rather, let another chain me down
With phantom fetters ? Am I bound to keep
A promise that I never meant to make ?

Enter Paul as if seeking for someone.

Paul. Is this the place where I was told to wait ?
I think it is, and here the lady comes.

Mercy. Would'st thou have speech with me, good
lad ?

Paul. Art thou that mistress Mercy, who, some time
since didst entertain one Jeremiah-put-not-your-trust-
in-princes Smith, and the young grandchild of the
Lord Protector ?

Mercy (aside). I am, though it was poor entertainment
—but costly.

Paul. Cromwell hath written thee a letter, which he
did entrust for delivery to that same Jeremiah, who
having fallen in with highwaymen on his way from
London, lieth wounded in a cottage hard by, and hath
sent me, his son, to give it into thy hands.

Mercy. I thank thee, but I am not fit to take it.

Paul. What meanest thou, lady ?

Mercy. Nay, it is nothing. Give me the letter.

She turns aside, and reads as follows :—

To one to whom I am much beholden : these :

MISTRESS,

We do much thank thee that thou, under God, hast afforded protection to one of our little ones. If there be aught in which our poor power can serve, thou hast but to command.

Thine for the Truth's sake,
OLIVER CROMWELL.

Mercy (aside). This is the last and worst. I bear no more.

I will be worthy of his confidence.

I will go look him in the face, and say:—

“Cromwell, I crave thy mercy, and thou best
Canst serve me by undoing my rash act.”

I will be true to what I thought was right,

When I had open heart and open eyes;

Not to the cause whose champion I became

By force, unwillingly, unconsciously,

When others led, and I walked gropingly

In paths I never knew. (*To Paul.*) Hast thou a horse?

Boy, dost thou know the way to London town?

And canst thou lead me thither?

Paul.

Yea, and will,

Though it be somewhat mad for thee to go.

I see thou art in trouble, and I haste

To take thee where thy comfort may be found.

Shall we not tell my father, ere we go?

Mercy. Nay, tell no man. I fear no danger, boy,
For I am desperate, and I would speak
With Cromwell ere to-morrow's sun has set.

Paul. We two alone? The way is rather rough.

Mercy. We two, alone, child, and this very night.
All night, all day, until Whitehall be reached
And I have done my errand. Speed thee now,
And bring the horses to the riverside.

Be secret, and my blessing is thine own. (*Exeunt.*)

Curtain.

ACT III.

Whitehall Palace. MILTON, seated at a table, writing.
CROMWELL pacing up and down, occasionally looking out of window.
Early morning.

Crom. Put by thy writing, Milton, if thine eyes
Do fail thee, for I would not have thee blind.

Mil. Nor I myself. I love my light, and yet
Salmasius must be answered. I must write,
Lord Cromwell, I must write and I must work
While the day lasteth, nor my duty shirk.
Night cometh fast (to me most fast of all!)
When no man worketh. I must write or die.

Crom. But the physicians say that thou wilt lose
The sight of both thine eyes, if thou dost use
Them overmuch.

Mil. I did not balance long
Whether my duty should or should not be
Preferréd to mine eyesight. I must write,
And after, I must sing—sing, if I can,
In my eternal darkness, Freedom's song,
To cheer men in the battle of the strong.

Crom. Milton thou speaketh truth, unflinching truth.
Some truths are stern. Some work is stern, like mine,
More stern than I would have it. I shall be
For ever handed down to history
As one who knew not mercy.

Mil. Nay, as one
Who did a work none other could have done.

Crom. I do not think so. Is it aught to me?
A little—much, according to my mood.
I should be iron-proof to thoughts like this:
But I am not. It would be very sweet
To feel myself a loved and honoured man.
I have been too avenging to be loved,
Too fiery to be honoured. Now, behold!

(Disclosing a coat of mail beneath his doublet.)

What I do wear beneath my robes of peace,
For fear of some who hate and threaten me.

Mil. Look for some hatred, Cromwell. Thou hast
been

A crier down of evils, and the men
Who wrought those evils scarcely look on thee
As benefactor. But the time will come
When those who reap the freedom thou hast sown
Will give thee back the love that thou hast lost
A hundred thousandfold. Though thou hast been
The soldier with the sword, thou art not less
A pow'r that makes for good. There will be peace
Hereafter, peace of conscience, happiness,
Fruits of thy strife, if this unruly child,
This England (whom I think we love the more
That she is wilful) do not throw away
The blessings that are given her to-day.

Crom. Ay, we do love her; and I count it well
To free her, even for a little time,
From some of her iniquity and crime.
A few among her children cry for "Peace"!
I tell them that there never shall be peace
While wrongs are unredressed and evil reigns,
And almost from the path of righteousness
The faithless many drive the faithful few.
Far better warfare than dishonest peace!
God only helpeth those who help themselves.
My brothers in the battle (thou art one)
Hold fast this truth, and are most dear to me.
A few there are have stood together long,
With small time for caresses. Come what will,
I think that we shall stand together still.
But some have failed. And when I sheathe my sword
And rest awhile, I think of them with pain,
A sorrow that is mingled with disdain.
My former brothers of the Parliament,
Whom I expelled, because their love was cold,
For my just Cause they made me merciless.

I bade them go with anger, well deserved
 By those who would do nothing, having pow'r
 To work unbounded good. ' I said to them :—
 " Ye were the stewards of our trust ; but now
 The Lord hath other servants ! Get you gone !
 And yield your places to more honest men."
 I was their equal, but became their judge,
 By virtue of my earnestness. 'Tis said
 That was the harshest action of my life ;
 It was by far the hardest.

Mil. It was good
 And meet that thou should'st chide indifference,
 Who, long ago, was one of those that took
 The name of—" Keepers of the Liberties
 Of England " : who a prouder title bear'st,
 As her Protector, than the highest prince
 Who ever forged her fetters ; who hast been
 The great avenging Justice of the times,
 The great Restorer of the people's rights,
 The strong right arm of England ; who art now
 Dictator, Consul—ev'rything but King !

Crom. And there are some would even make me that,
 Although my nearest friends withhold their voice
 From the request that I would now restore
 What has been dead, and fill the Stuart throne.

Mil. Thy nearest friends are right. Thou must not
 take
 A kingly title with thy kingly pow'r,
 Or straightway thou wilt lose the confidence
 Of half the people.

Crom. I am sure of that.
 Like Antony, they offer me the Crown.
 Like Cæsar, I refuse it ; but I trust
 With better motives ; for I truly love
 The people which I rule, most heartily
 Desire their welfare. Were they all my own,
 All one in asking and desiring it,
 I *might* be king—I do not say I *should*.

I think it would be best, if possible,
 That England should be ruled by Parliament
 And by one man, with somewhat royal pow'r,
 But not tyrannical, or privileged
 Above his fellow men, as if he were
 A god, come down to judge or favour them.
 This said I in the Council.

A noise is heard without.

Mil. Why, what noise?
 Is it the rumbling of a distant storm?
 Is it the tramping of an arméd host,
 That marcheth on to triumph or defeat?
 It should be victory on such a day!

Crom. On such a day? Why such a day as this?

Mil. The third day of September!

Crom. Even so.
 I do remember. Has the morning dawned?
 We revel not o' nights, like Antony,
 But we do labour. We have laboured long,
 If day has come and found us working still—
 Or talking. Look, I pray thee, to thine eyes,
 Lest thou be left in darkness, lest thou find
 Thou canst not use the talent which thou hast.

Mil. I will. I leave thee now a little time.

Crom. Well then, good-night—good-morrow—what
 thou wilt,
 I go to pray, and then to rest awhile.

Milton turns as he reaches the door.

Mil. I think not, Cromwell. There is someone here
 Who claims a quick admittance.

Exit Milton. Enter Maurice very hurriedly.

Maur. I would speak
 With the Protector! They have changed their plans.
 I come in haste to tell thee. They have lost
 The maiden whom they would proclaim as queen.

Crom. Lost?

Maur. Yea, she hath fled. 'Tis rumoured she is here.

Crom. How! Here? We do not shelter royalists!
My trust in thee is waning. Is thy tale
A fiction cloak to cover traitrous fact?

Maur. Nay, hear me, Lord Protector, if thou be
An upright man, and justice be thy aim!
I have not loved thee hitherto. It was
Not love that told my story yesterday—
(Leastways I think it was not love of thee!)
Hear, while there yet is time, I do entreat!
Diana—that old hag I told thee of—
Is mad with fury. She was mad before,
But that was nothing! She hath wondrous pow'r,
And uses it for evil. She hath roused
A few fanatics, and they purpose now
To wreak their vengeance on the maiden's head
When she returneth—as she *must* return,
Unless thou give protection, who art called
Protector.

Crom. Must I keep a rebel girl
From what she well deserves?

Maur. No rebel she!
Thou know'st it well. Lord Cromwell, I did say
I had not loved thee hitherto; but now,
If thou wilt hearken, I will serve thee well.
I know that thou hast sent thine Ironsides
Some hours ago. I know that thou hast crushed
All hope of rising that there may have been
In foolish hearts. I know that this revolt,
So great to them, will never e'en be known,
Save to thyself and those that thou wilt tell.
I know there is no danger unto thee—
No danger to the land or Parliament—
But to the Lady Mercy! She must bear
The worst part of the battle. She must be
The one to pay for thy security.

Crom. The "Lady Mercy"! Thou art cavalier
Beneath the surface still. What should I do
To one who, though she cannot work it harm,
Hath dared to threaten England's Liberty?
Hath dared to make herself the patroness
Of those who, even uselessly, defy
The Commonwealth, which Heaven hath ordained?
Not long hath—"To your tents, O Israel!"
Been silenced in the dwellings of the just.
The battle-cry hath scarcely died away
Within the hearts and on the lips of saints.

Maur. What hast thou done with Mercy? Is she
dead?
—Imprisoned? Is your Highness' heart of stone?

Crom. I have no heart except for innocence.

Maur. Then perfect innocence shall plead with thee,
If thou wilt send and fetch thy prisoner.

Crom. I tell thee that I have no prisoner,
Save one or two of thy deserted host,
Who promised to be somewhat troublesome,
And old Diana. Is she innocent?

Maur. (*Assuming a threatening attitude.*)
Thy words are false, Protector though thou art!
I know that she is here!

Crom. Who told thee so?

Maur. A servant of thine own. Deny it not!

Crom. A servant of mine own?

Maur. (*recklessly*). Ay, perjured one!
The Lord's Anointed if thou think thou art,
Call in thy Cherethites and Pelethites!
The Lady Mercy is not unavenged!

He draws his sword and attacks Cromwell, who defends himself. They fight, and Maurice is forced down upon one knee.

Crom. Hold! Stand! Deliver! Friend, thou art distraught.

I call no guards against an honest man
Who fighteth for a woman, though it be
Without a cause. Take back thy foolish words.
Thy Mercy is not here, nor ever was.
Who told thee lied! I never saw her face!

Maurice surrenders, delivering up his sword.

Maur. Enough, my lord. I yield me to thy grace.

Cromwell returns Maurice's sword.

Crom. Then thou art free—free to go hence, and bring
The man or youth who told thee such a thing,
That I may charge him with it to his face.

Enter Paul.

Maur. There is no need. He cometh of himself.
He stands convicted.

Crom. Is it Paul?

Maur. The same.

Crom. (to Paul). Why didst thou say I had a lady here,
Held prisoner?

Paul. I said not so, my lord,
At least, I said not she was prisoner.
But one had told me that this gentleman
Was loyal to the lady and to thee
(In what I know not), so I went to him,
When we arrived together from the north,
The lady and myself. I did but say
That Mistress Mercy was within these walls.
Which was indeed the truth: for so she is.

Maur. My lord, I crave thy pardon once again.
I knew that she was here. Anxiety
Fancied that she was in captivity.

Crom. 'Tis nothing. But I do not understand
Why she should seek one whom 'twere best to flee
With such a guilt as hers.

Paul. She bade me say
That Mercy Stuart doth most humbly pray
For speech with the Protector instantly.

Crom. A Stuart seeketh Cromwell! Let her come!

Enter Mercy, with a long dark cloak over her dress of white and pale blue.

Mercy (cautiously to Cromwell, without seeing Maurice).
Are we alone?

Maur. Nay, Mercy, I am here.

Mercy. Thou, Maurice! Why, what brings thee to
Whitehall?

Maur. Desire to serve thee in the only way
That ever will light fire of gratitude
Within thy heart. In brief, then, to betray.

Mercy. Then thou hast saved me much. I thank
thee, friend.

Lord Cromwell, I am that unhappy girl
Whom much persuasion, wishes of her friends,
A certain pity, and a certain fear,
Made false to her convictions for a time.
I came to make confession, but I find
It hath been made already. That is well.
I do not kneel to thee, or bow to thee,
Or greet thee in the manner of the kings,
But, as thy fellow-servant, ask thy grace,
And that of England, whom we both should serve.

Crom. Methinks repentance cometh somewhat late.
Charles, thy great-uncle, he who was his friend
To his undoing and his bitter woe,

The Earl of Strafford, were both "thorough" once.
I will be thorough now. (*To Paul.*) Come hither, Paul.
Go to the keepers of the prison cells,
And bid them bring Diana, under guard.

Paul salutes and exit. Mercy talks to Maurice aside.

Mercy. What saith His Highness?

Crom. (sternly). Have no speech with him,
No whisperings. My servants shall not be
Companions of such Jezebels as thee!

Enter Paul in great terror.

Paul. She hath escaped! Prepare! She comes
this way!
She hath escaped her guards. She awed them so
By her feigned sorceries and fearful cries
That they have let her go and fled away.

There is the sound of a disturbance outside, Diana rushes in screaming, and is secured by Maurice and Cromwell, but continues to struggle.

Diana. I was a prince's bride—a prince's bride!
And they imprison me with criminals!

Crom. Diana, thou art heathen as thy name.
What care we now for princes? Hold thy peace!

Diana. Traitor, away! Thou should'st love yonder
girl,
She saved thy grandchild, when I threatened her.
I will not hold my peace! With all my heart
I would she had been slain, to punish thee
For all thy murders!

Crom. Why, what talk is this?
What speak'st thou of my grandchild? Is she safe?

Maur. Ay, 'tis a long-past story. Long ago
I might have told thee, if I had but known.

A child of thy house was the innocent,
But none less fatal cause of all this strife.

Crom. Thy meaning is in darkness. How can she
Be cause of what Diana tried to do ?

Maur. Consent to reign o'er the conspirators,
If they should be successful, was the price
That Mistress Mercy paid her grandmother
For thy young grandchild's safety, on the night
That Jeremiah left her in her care.

Crom. Mistress, I would I had known this before.

Mercy. I thought that thou did'st know and did'st
not care.

Crom. England and Cromwell have not hearts of ice.
A righteous warfare hath not made them cold.
It hath but warmed their blood, and prompted them
To words of love and generosity,
As well as of rebuke and punishment.
Kind deeds and noble ones reach soldier-souls
As soon as any, and awake to life
A sleeping fire of fervent gratitude
More strong than other men's. I rule the land,
And many call me harsh and cruel judge ;
But I am soldier and enthusiast,
Within my soul, above all other things.
The wrong which thou hast done, if wrong it be,
Is washed away in thy sweet pity's tears.
It is no more. Go thou thy way in peace !
England and Cromwell have forgotten it.

Diana. I ask no pardon ! I would not accept
Such mockery, if thou did'st offer it !
Prince Henry would have scorned thee 'neath his foot !
Had he but lived, he had been absolute,
A tyrant to such upstart dogs as thou !
Thou art a farmer, and a brewer's son !
I am a princess, and I do not bow
To one I would not even stoop to touch !
Ye gods and furies ! Look at yonder girl !

She points scornfully at Mercy, who has thrown herself at Cromwell's feet.

Mercy. I knelt not for myself. I kneel for her.
Lord Cromwell, take no heed of her at all.
She is beside herself. Be kind to her.
Have thou compassion on her failing years,
Her disappointment, her long widowhood,
The thousand things which make her what she is.

Crom. She asks no mercy, and I give her none.
The very reasons why I pardoned thee
Forbid that I should do the same to her.
She caused thee to offend. She tried to take
The life which thy submission bought at last.
I love my country, which she would oppress.
I love my grandchild, whom she sought to slay.
She is a rebel. If I pardon that,
She dieth as a self-named sorceress,
One who hath boasted of her intercourse
With spirits of the darkness. Pardon that,
She suffers as a would-be murderess.
There is no hope. I never can forgive.
She might die thrice, ere justice would be done.

Mercy. My lord, I claim a promise and a boon.
"If there be aught in which my pow'r can serve,
Thou hast but to command"—thy letter runs,
I have it here. I ask Diana's life.
Thou man of honour, keep thy plighted word!

Crom. I trust I may. I am sore tempted now.
My little grandchild, and my plighted word!

He turns aside. Mercy looks appealingly at Maurice.

Maur. This year, the battle of thy battle day
Is not Dunbar or Worcester, but a fray
Within thy inmost heart. Revenge is sweet;
But, if thou take it, 'tis thy first defeat.

Cromwell comes forward, and lays his hand upon Mercy's shoulder.

Crom. It shall not be defeat, I triumph still.
Maiden, thy boon is granted. Tell her so,
Diana—for I cannot speak to her.
Daughter, be comforted. And when they say,
“Behold! a man of iron, merciless!”
Remember, I was merciful for thee.

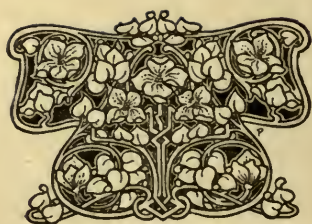
Curtain.

Christmas, 1898.



"TWO NATIONS":

A STORY OF THE BARONS' WAR.



"TWO NATIONS."

Dramatis Personæ.

SIR GILBERT DE WARRENNE	-	<i>A Norman Knight.</i>
SIR HEREWARD TORFRIDASSON	-	<i>A descendant of Hereward the Wake.</i>
THE DUKE OF GLOUCESTER	-	<i>One of the Barons.</i>
OFFA OFFASSON	-	<i>A young boy, formerly a slave.</i>
ENA	-	<i>A child, sister to Offa.</i>
ORIENTA	-	<i>An aged Saracen (blind).</i>
ROSAMUND OF WINCHESTER	-	<i>The King's Ward.</i>
SIR SIMON DE MONTFORT	-	<i>Earl of Leicester.</i>

ACT I. The year of the solemn ratification of the Great Charter. The banks of the Thames, near Westminster Hall.

ACT II. 1264. Interior of "The Temple of Security," a cavern in the South Downs, about two miles from Lewes.

ACT III. 1265. The open country near Evesham.
Scene I. Evening.
Scene II. The morning of the battle.

ACT I.

The banks of the Thames. ROSAMUND OF WINCHESTER and SIR GILBERT DE WARRENNE returning from a meeting in Westminster Hall, disguised.

Gil. 'Tis meet that we wait here and give him thanks.
He hath shewn kindness, knowing not our names,
Or whence we came, or what our errand was.

Bear thou in mind, it is no little thing
 To gain admittance to the council hall
 At such a time. Moreover, we are here
 As utter strangers, bringing not the pass
 Of noble birth, nor yet the gaudy badge
 Of wealth—a burgher and a simple maid,
 Two units in the multitude, to him
 Who granted us this favour. He, methinks,
 Is worthy of a word of gratitude,
 E'en from the royal lips of Rosamund.
 Didst thou not mark that there awaited him
 A place of honour, by Lord Leicester's side?
 And he was proudly glad, but sought it not
 Till through the doors of that historic hall
 We also passed unhindered. There were tears,
 Hot tears of disappointment, in thine eyes,
 When we were turning sadly home again,
 Rejected. Hast thou, then, no praise for him
 Who turned vexation into victory?

Ros. O Gilbert! I have praise for no one now.
 I have been wilful, maybe most unwise,
 In coming here, without the king's consent,
 To play the spy. I do not triumph now.
 At Winchester, within the palace walls,
 The king's own ward, caressing and caressed,
 I might have been content. But thou dost know
 That I was ever passionate; and when
 There came dark rumours that the king was false—
 That he was perjured, that the aged man
 Who loved me as a daughter was untrue,
 I would not hear them. I defied the world.
 I put my hands before my ears and cried:—
 “Long live King Henry!” But my heart was sore.
 And daily it grew sorer, till I knew
 There was no peace for me in earth or Heaven,
 Until the truth was known. And so it chanced
 That when the king was gone and all the court,
 And I was lonely, save for one or two,
 I pondered o'er this matter, and I thought:—
 “I am not Gilbert's pupil if I fail

To find and follow honour ; nor am I
 The daughter of the fearless Adela
 If I go not to Westminster, to hear
 The king's own words, the king's accusers near."

Gil. Call it not wilfulness, this deed of thine.
 It is a noble daring that can risk
 The proving of a life-long prejudice, —
 A nobler frankness that can cast it off
 If it be worthless. I have ever tried
 To teach thee something of this nobleness,
 And thou thy soul's perplexities hast shewn
 To me, who hold thee dear as he whose name
 Is set above our blaming holdeth thee.
 Thou hast borne much excitement. Not this morn,
 Nor yet to-morrow, but a later day,
 Ask I of Rosamund what Westminster
 Hath whispered to her spirit.

Ros. Gilbert, list !
 I should not try thy patience, if my lips
 Were not so cowardly, for Westminster
 Is thou, without thy saving tenderness :
 She speaketh very plainly. For this knight—
 I would not meet with him. We do not love
 The men who cast our idols to the ground,
 While we are only learning painfully
 That they are idols. Afterwards, perchance,
 I shall be grateful ; but to-day my heart
 Rebels against the cruelty of truth,
 And cannot favour her ambassadors,
 Or e'en hold parley with them.

(*Hereward is seen in the distance.*)

Gil. See ! he comes—
 Our stranger passing homewards from the hall.

Ros. He is more knightly than the most of them
 That are King Henry's foemen, and I would
 He were not Leicester's lover, for the Earl
 Hath stabbed me with the dagger of his wrath
 Against my guardian-king.

Gil. Stand back, I pray,
And veil thyself while I do speak with him.
He is too young to be ungenerous.
It may be he will throw a softer light
O'er those same actions of our sov'reign liege
Which seem so glaring to our honesty,
And hurt affection's eyes.

Ros. I still may hope ?

Gil. Let not thy loyalty expect too much.

Ros. I hope for all, till everything is lost.

Enter Hereward. Gilbert advances to meet him. Rosamund veils herself and retires.

Gil. Sir knight, we give thee greeting, render thanks
For thy kind courtesy, and fain would ask
Another favour. We have little means
Of giving any worthy recompense.

Her. It matters not. I seek not for reward,
Save such as all can give. I wish to serve
The damsel that is with thee. If she will
But raise her veil, that I may see her face,
I shall be well repaid and satisfied :
For I would fain discover if the maid
Be fair and queenly as the gentle child.
If she refuse, I do submit myself
To her decree. But all thy care is vain.
Had twenty years gone by, instead of six,
Since, at Northampton in the lists, I won
Her childish favour, they would not suffice
To dim the picture of the memory
Of yonder lady.

Gil. Sir, it well may be
Thou art mistaken. There are maids and maids.

Her. But only one surnamed "of Winchester,"
And only one, I wot of, who is ward
To that pale shadow of a ruler that

We still do suffer. Only one, I ween,
 To whom such heritage of bravery
 Was given in the far-off Eastern land,
 As Adela, Princess of Normandy,
 Bequeathed to her fair daughter Rosamund.

Ros. 'Tis certain he doth know me! We are lost!

Her. Why lost, because I know thee? Six long
 years,

For love of thee and hope of winning thee,
 Remembrance of my early boyish fight,
 Fair promise of the years that are to be,
 And harmless talisman, to help me still
 To keep myself "unspotted from the world"
 Have I preserved thy ribbon. See! It is
 As thou didst wear it. Thou wast twelve years old,
 And I, the youngest champion of them all,
 But newly vowed to knighthood, ardently
 Desired thy smile, and strove with double strength,
 And laid my honours at thy feet, and placed
 The crown of Love and Beauty on thy brow.
 That was a golden day!

Ros. (advancing). Why, surely thou
 Art Hereward Torfridasson! 'Tis strange
 That thou should'st meet me in such sorry plight.

Her. Wert thou what thou dost seem, thine ornament
 None other than a sweet simplicity,
 Thy name the lowliest, thy dow'r thyself,
 The man who claimeth kinship with the serf—
 Who looks not now for mastery, but far
 Behind the generations, sees his race
 A kingly nation—such a man, I say,
 Would still, in all humility, implore
 The right to labour yet for Rosamund.

Ros. Ah! thou art Saxon! Yes, I might have known.
 Thou hast a Saxon name, a Saxon heart—
 And I am Norman, and a Norman's ward!
 I pray thee, give my ribbon back again.

Of Church and State, he spake his latest word,
The most emphatic promise of them all.

Ros. And if it chance that he respect it not?

Her. He will undo himself! I stand or fall
With Leicester. All the country looks to him
For a redress of grievances. His name
Is called "The Righteous"; it becomes him well.
I cannot choose but follow him who is
My hero-friend. I fear that there will be
Much warfare if our sov'reign play us false.
As yet we cannot tell. For thy sweet sake,
I trust it may be otherwise. Farewell!

Ros. Farewell! In time of battle we shall meet,
And give each other greeting. If thou hear
Strange things of Rosamund of Winchester,
Thou wilt not marvel, but thou wilt rejoice
To think thy helmet doth not bear her badge.
Nay, tarry yet a moment. Long ago
I held my hand towards thee, and the prize
Of valour lay within it. Now, behold!
'Tis empty. Wilt thou touch it once again?
A Norman loveth homage!

He raises her hand to his lips, and goes out hastily.

Gil. He is gone.
We also must depart, for if the king,
Returning, find deserted palace halls,
His wrath and sorrow will o'erwhelm us both.

Ros. Gilbert, I go no more to Winchester.

Gil. No more to Winchester? No more? No more
Thou hast been used to dwell in palaces,
To wear soft raiment, to be ever "Queen
Of Beauty" in the life-long tournament.
Thou canst not live unfriended and alone.
Thou art but young. What roof will shelter thee?

Ros. I know not ; yet I know this thing must be.
 Sir Hereward spoke truly. Shall I, then,
 Feign love, where reverence hath fled, and speak
 Soft words, with lips that long to tell my scorn ?
 I should despise myself, and daily grow
 More cold in my caresses, while reproach
 Would look upon me, from the tearful eyes
 Of him who one time was my guardian-king.
 I cannot do it, Gilbert ! So I go
 To follow out thy teaching, and behold !
 No grief or fear shall hinder me !

Gil. 'Tis true.
 Thy resolution taken, it is vain
 To seek to move thee. It is well that I
 Have known thee from an infant, otherwise
 I might have wasted breath in telling thee
 Of danger.

Ros. O ! my truest friend, forbear !
 My elder brother, love me once again !
 My teacher, smile approval once again !
 My comrade, take me by the hand again !
 Wherein have I offended thee ? Alas !
 I stand alone !

Enter Offa, followed by Ena, and pursued by the Duke of Gloucester's serfs

Offa. A champion ! Help ! Redress !
 Grace for the weak ! A champion brave, to fight
 The Duke of Gloucester ! He hath done me wrong :
 For I was born his villein, but I bought
 My freedom, two years since, and also that
 Of my young sister. Now, to-day, we go
 To see Lord Leicester coming from the hall,
 Sir Simon, called " The Righteous," whom we love,
 And lo ! the Duke enslaveth us again !
 Redress ! I only would that I were armed.
 I should not then demand a champion knight,
 But I am helpless in his hands, for he
 Is covered o'er with armour, and he wields

Great weapons like a giant. I appeal
 To thee, if thou be just as thou art strong ;
 To thee, sweet lady, if, perchance, thou hast
 A little sister, that thou bid thy friend,
 Do battle for the poor and the oppressed.

Ros. The knight is not my lover. He is free.
 Turn thou to him. I am too sad at heart
 To listen to the wrongs of all the world.

Gil. I cannot leave this damsel.

Offa (*hearing the cries of his pursuers*). Oh ! the crowd
 Is drawing near, the crowd of Gloucester's serfs !
 If but a moment, with his mighty arm,
 In charity, some knight would hold them back,
 We surely should escape, beyond the reach
 Of our great persecutor ; for I know
 Of a safe haven where we may abide,
 Where many seek and find security.

Ros. A refuge ! Is it distant ? Tell me true.

Offa. It is a cavern in the Sussex hills,
 A temple of great safety, and therein
 Doth dwell an ancient dame whom people hold
 In veneration. Many flee to her ;
 And never in my lifetime have I heard
 That e'en the boldest soldier dared profane
 Her sanctuary, or lay hands on those
 Who stood within the shelter of her love,
 O'ershadowed by her kindness. She is wise,
 With wisdom sought for nigh a century.
 For she was grown a woman, it is said
 Before King John or brave King Richard reigned.
 But then she sojourned in a far-off land,
 The country of the rising sun, and thence
 She came to England fifteen years ago.
 She hath more pow'r than Henry on his throne,
 As much as Leicester on his battle-horse.
 The guilty fear her ; but the hunted, wronged,
 And heavy-hearted find her welcome sweet.

Ros. O Gilbert! such a rest would be to me
 Salvation. I am troubled, weary, sad,
 I know not what is best to do, except
 That I no more can go to Winchester;
 That I no more can think as I have thought,
 Or speak as I have spoken hitherto.

Gil. (to Offa). Attend me, fellow! I will fight for thee
 On one condition. Down upon thy knees,
 And put thy hands within my hands, and swear
 To take this maiden with thee: treating her
 In all things as a faithful slave would treat
 The daughter of his master: caring for
 Her safety and her happiness as though
 She were as near and dear to thee as this
 Young sister: bringing her without delay
 To that safe place of which thy lips did speak.

Offa (kneeling). I swear in all things to regard the maid
 At once as sister, queen, and sacred charge;
 To bring her swiftly to the Sussex hills,
 To that safe refuge which is called of men
 "The Temple of Security," to her
 Who deals in wisdom, kindness and love.

Gil. Fair Rosamund, my Rosamund, farewell!
 We part in tenderness, without reproach.
 I taught thee to be honest and sincere,
 And grieve not thou hast learnt thy lesson well.

Ros. My more than kinsman, guide and friend, adieu!

Rosamund departs slowly with Offa and Ena.

Gil. She comes no more to Winchester! We part;
 And I have lost her who has ever been
 The end of all my longings. God is good:
 The world is great. I ride about the world,
 And fight for God; and if I fall, perchance,
 Another world is greater. Rosamund,
 For evermore my blessings follow thee!

Curtain.

ACT II.

The Cavern in the Sussex hills known as "The Temple of Security." Enter ROSAMUND, carrying a dark lantern and leading ORIENTA the SARACEN, who is blind. The battle of Lewes is being fought upon and near the hillside.

Ros. Oh! what a mockery it is that we,
Within the arms of mother-earth, can find
Such rest and quiet, that though warfare rage
Above us and around us, not a sound
Disturbs the silence of our dwelling-place!

Ori sits down upon a piece of fallen rock. *Rosamund paces restlessly to and fro.*

Ori. It would be heavenly if we ourselves
Were in accordance with this perfect peace!
What is this stillness? Is it true repose,
When thou art throbbing with a great desire
To stand and watch the battle from the hill?
What is this safety? It is valueless:
For thou art trembling, with no danger near.
Dear daughter, come and sit by me awhile,
And calm thyself. I know not who thou art.
I cannot see thee, with my blind old eyes.
But this I doubt not: trouble brought thee here
These many months ago, and I was glad
To hear a maiden's voice, and did forbear
To question thee. In truth, I seldom ask
The names of those I succour. Oftentimes
My refugees repay with confidence
The little good I do them. Come, my child!
My ears I lack not, and they tell me now
Of restless agitation. All in vain
It is that thou dost fret and vex thyself.

Rosamund kneels down by Ori.

Ros. O Ori! have the passing years
Bereft thee of thy passion, carried thee
Beyond enthusiasm, and the pain

Of feeling very keenly? If it be,
 Then I would die a child! The people say—
 "Thou wearest thyself out with love and hate!"
 I know it. Yes, I know it. None the less,
 Our hearts must beat with sympathy for good
 And burn with indignation 'gainst the wrong,
 Else are we dead, and I would be alive,
 Not in a trance, like those who have no pain.
 Good mother, thou art wondrous wise and kind.
 Thou canst not lessen the intensity
 Of my excitement by desiring me
 To tell thee of my history. To-night,
 If we must speak, I pray thee, let it be
 About the days of long ago. There clings
 A glamour, fascination, mystery
 Around the past, around the Eastern land,
 The country of thy childhood, which I love.

Ori. Canst thou give credit to the marvellous?

Ros. I can, and will most willingly. A tale
 Is full of charm, if it be wonderful.
 Hold thou my hand in thine, and put thine arm
 Around me. I am shivering, and yet
 It is not cold. How dimly burns the light!
 I like dim lights for story-telling. Now
 I can attend thee. I will strive to think
 No more of battles, till thy tale be told.

Ori. The first King Henry sat upon the throne
 Of England, when, from very far away,
 There came a daughter of the Saracens,
 To seek her lover. A crusader he,
 Made captive by her sire. But while he lay
 In prison she consoled him, shewing him
 Much kindness. When he was at liberty
 She followed him to England, having faith
 That he would keep his troth with her. She knew
 Just "London," "Gilbert," and no other word
 Of her love's language. But these golden keys
 Unlocked the treasure-chest of happiness.
 Of these two cherished names, the first procured

Her passage on a ship, which carried her
 To England; and the second, echoing
 Within the streets of London, woke again
 The old affection in her lover's heart.
 He kept his promise. They were wed and lived
 In happiness, till a new king arose,
 And after him another. Then a man,
 A certain Thomas Becket, filled the land
 With envy of his greatness, and the king
 Did "lean upon his hand" most lovingly.
 The son of Gilbert and the Saracen
 Was he, and they were happy in his joy,
 But soon had cause for sorrow, when he lay
 Upon the altar steps, a sacrifice
 To the Plantagenet. The Saracen
 Was broken-hearted. In the Eastern land,
 Her younger sister, who had loved her well,
 And deemed her a princess, could scarce believe
 How she had fallen, weighted with her woe.

Ros. What happened after? Did the sister come
 To England?

Ori. Nay, my child. She could not change
 The evil, so she lingered on awhile
 In her own country, with her lord (for she
 Was wedded, long before). He died: she took
 Her sole surviving child, and went to dwell
 Within the city of Jerusalem;
 For war had come again, and she was glad
 To help the wounded, whether friend or foe.
 So she grew old, and full of years she died.
 Her daughter, when she grew to womanhood,
 Espoused a prince, and, dying, likewise left
 Her rank and riches to a maiden child.
 The girl was lonely. Neither kin nor friend
 Had she, and half her lifetime passed away
 In uneventful peace; until there came
 Another war, and she bethought herself
 Of how her grandam made herself beloved
 Of those who suffered; and she also gave

Her succour to the wounded, seeking not
 For recompense. Crusaders came and went,
 Unheeding: till, one ne'er forgotten day,
 A young princess of Normandy, the wife
 Of one who bore the fatal cross, implored
 Protection. It was given willingly:
 For Adela was lovable and sweet
 Beyond my pow'r of telling.

Ros.

Adela !

Ori. Ay, child. It may be thou hast heard her name.

Ros. Yes, I have heard it. Is that all thy tale ?

Ori. Nay, there is something more. To Adela
 Was born a daughter, at Jerusalem.
 The selfsame week her knight was slain, and she,
 Who to one holy city followed him,
 Left him not lonely in a Holier.
 The babe was sent to England. She had been
 Called "Rosamund," because the mother said :—
 "Within the kingdom of my kinsman dwell
 Two nations, hating with a deadly hate.
 My Norman child shall have a Saxon name,
 That she may lose this prejudice, and give
 To each a measure of her love."

Ros. (aside).

Alas !

What have I done ? (*To Orianta*) The end of it I pray.
 Hath Rosamund been faithful to her trust ?

Ori. I know not yet. The end is still to come.
 I wait for tidings of her.

Ros.

If she be

King Henry's ward, and called by his name,
 I know that she hath fled from Winchester,
 'Tis said, because she cannot think with him
 Concerning all this trouble : for her heart
 Is with the righteous Earl. One thing, I pray,
 How didst thou know this story ? Thou dost speak
 As if thine eyes had seen this Adela,
 As if thine ears had listened to her words.

Ori. These stories are but one to me ; for she,
 Whose nephew in a Kentish city lies
 Enshrined for ever, was my grandmother,
 My mother's mother ; therefore I am she
 Who cared for Adela in Palestine.
 I hope to hear her daughter's voice. I keep
 My rocky gates wide open, and await
 Her coming. Maiden, I am weary now
 With all this speaking, I will rest within.

Ros. Then I will watch. The battle rages still.
 Perchance, our messengers will soon return,
 And bring us tidings, or some warrior,
 Sore wounded, may entreat a brief repose.

Ori. So be it, thou shalt watch.

Ros. Will Offa come ?

Ori. I hope so. It is time that he was here.

Orientalia goes into the inner cave. Rosamund, alone, looks round on the weapons which hang upon the rocky walls and takes down one of them.

Ros. Poor creature ! Waiting for this Rosamund
 Who is so wayward ! Dare I own my name
 When I have sent away my loyal knight,
 Because he is a Saxon ? How the sight
 Of all these weapons haunts and troubles me !
 'Tis very strange ! I was not wont to be
 So foolish. I have played with things like this,
 Not dreaming of the evil they might work.
 Ah ! it is different ! We hold a sword
 Less lightly in a time of mortal strife !
 I wonder how the Earl of Leicester fares.
 He is right noble, I shall weep for him,
 As well as for another, if they fall.

Enter the Duke of Gloucester. Rosamund sits in the shadow at the extreme end of the cave. The sword is in her hand. The lantern is turned to the wall. Gloucester does not see her.

Glo. So I have found this treasure-house at last !
 I thank the stars my future is assured.
 What care I for the battle ? Leicester's men
 Were never mine in heart. I love them not ;

And their devotion ever is outpoured
 Before De Montfort's shrine. I was a fool
 To swear allegiance to his traitrous cause!
 I was a fool, but 'tis no matter now,
 For covenants count little, happily!
 His Holiness will loose me from the chain
 Of that rash vow, as he released the king
 From keeping the Great Charter. It is said
 That he will excommunicate the Earl
 If he should win this conflict. All goes well!
 I have been able to withdraw my men
 From the great fighting centre, so that they
 Are nearly useless. I have prospered, too,
 In passing from their midst, without mishap
 Or hindrance. I have also chanced upon
 This cave, which is reported full of gold
 Or other treasure of the Saracens,
 Which well may buy my pardon from the king,
 And my indulgence from the pope, besides
 An honoured post within the royal ranks.
 Hurrah for Gloucester! And long live the king!

Rosamund rises suddenly, and lifts the lantern so that the light falls on Gloucester's face.

Ros. Halt, Duke of Gloucester! This is woman's ground!
 Advance no farther, or I count thee foe!
 This place, "The Temple of Security,"
 Was never yet profaned by robbery,
 Or any other crime. These rocky walls
 Conceal no gold, of which I ever heard.
 Go back, and leave in peace the aged dame
 Who dwelleth in this fortress, or, methinks,
 Thy stars will aid thee little. We have friends,
 And I myself will be a battle-maid,
 For her dear sake who helped me in distress!

Glo. I have no quarrel with thee; so forbear
 Thy chidings and defiance, "battle-maid"!
 My words were nought. I came a suppliant,

To beg thy succour for a gallant knight,
An ardent lover of my brother Earl,
Who lieth wounded on the battlefield.

Ros. Lord Duke, I put no meaning on thy words,
Save that thou art a coward, and dost seek
To cloak thy baseness with a false excuse.

Glo. I do assure thee that I speak the truth.
The warrior is one whom all the world
Doth know, because to many men he stands
As champion of a race that once was great,
But fell, a long time since, beneath the feet
Of conquerors, who came from over sea.
A conquest leaves sore hearts and bitterness ;
And those who claim descent from former chiefs,
From kings who lie dishonoured in the dust,
Forget not, though their countrymen forget,
Forgive not, though distinctions fade away.
So is it with the people of this land—
Two nations, somewhat mingled, yet apart
And separate as ever in their hate.
And some do claim, like him of whom I speak,
To draw their blood from the same river source
Of glory whence there came their hero's life,
Their latest chieftain, whom they still revere,
The Darling of the English, called "The Wake."

Ros. Sir Hereward Torfridasson !

Glo. 'Tis he.

Ros. And is he wounded with a deadly wound ?
O Heavens ! What a judgment on my pride !
I hate thee, sword ! I hate thee ! If thou hast
A spark of pity, evil messenger,
Thou wilt depart and speak no more of blood.
'Tis red as the poor ribbon I refused !

Glo. Ah ! now I know thee, damsel. Thou wast ward
To Henry, surnamed "Winchester," our king,
And didst desert him. All the city rings
With condemnation of thine infamy !

Ros. Hast thou come here to torture me ?

Enter Offa from behind. He comes between them.

Offa. How now !
What wrong is this ? What sorrow ? Knight, beware !
This maiden is my sister, bound to me,
Not by the ties of flesh and blood, but by
A sacred oath, and I will stand by her !

Glo. I did but tell her of the things which be !

Offa. Thou shalt not trouble her. Go, coward ; go !
Methinks I know thy voice. Stay, give a light.

He flashes the light of the lantern in Gloucester's face.

Yea, verily it is as I did think
And thou art Gloucester ! Lady, bend thine ear
To hear no words of his, for he is false—
As false as was his father, who refused
To seal his promise of my liberty
With fair performance !

Glo. Not so false as she
Whom I beheld at Westminster, whose acts
Are treachery towards her guardian-king.
The barons do not look on her with trust.

Ros. Know thou, I, Rosamund of Winchester,
Have much to sorrow over and repent
Of many great transgressions ; but my soul
Is innocent of falsehood. And the Earl,
The mightiest of Henry's foes, will know
I am at least no hypocrite, and so
Will others.

Glo. Yes, some others ! Maybe, he
Who lies half dying on the hillside here
Of whom thou makest idle jest, because
He is a Saxon, lowlier than thou.

Ros. I am rebuked with justice, but the lips
Which utter the reproaches should be true.

Offa. And his are not. I know him well of old.
 I dwelt ten years within his father's house,
 And suffered oft unjustly, 'neath the rod,
 For his offences, which he feared to own—
 He seeks but to affright thee. He is here
 For some dark purpose—He is cowardly!

Glo. Young dog, retract thy sayings! If my blade
 Were other than a Norman's, it should lie
 Within thy Saxon bosom!

Offa. Dost thou dare?
 The God of Battles and the God of Peace,
 Who stood beside young David, when he fought
 With one more strong than thou art, will not fail
 To help a boy, whose heart is innocent,
 Although the son of a despised race,
 Against a lying giant.

Glo. Thou hast said
 I dare not. Slave, thy blood is on thy head!
 I wash my hands of it, for none may say
 "Thou dar'st not" to a Norman Duke and live.
 I, Duke of Gloucester, by inheritance
 From him who slew De Warrenne—

Ros. (Gilbert dead!)

Glo. Do challenge thee, young Offa Offasson,
 To answer for thine insults with thy sword!

He throws down his glove. Offa picks it up.

Offa. And I accept thy gauntlet; not to fight
 Unarmed, nor in a cavern, nor beside
 The Lady Rosamund; but two days hence,
 Wherever it shall please thee, so it be
 In open field in sight of witnesses.

Glo. Well then, beyond the river.

Offa. Even so.

Exit Gloucester. Rosamund kneels to Offa.

Ros. O Offa! See I kiss thy hands and feet!
I pray thee, die not for this Rosamund!
She is not worthy.

Offa. She is what my thoughts
Have made her, and Sir Gilbert gave her me,
The price of freedom.

Ros. Yea, and Gilbert's life!

Offa. I do beseech thee not to charge thyself
With that, for, if there be reproach at all,
It is not thine but mine, for whom he fought.
Forget not, if thou love his memory,
He bound me by my honour, evermore,
When any sought to vex and trouble thee,
To battle for thy peace and happiness.
Thou would'st not have me break my word to him.

Ros. I cannot tell. I would not have thee die.
I am a most unhappy maid; whose knights
Are ever left upon the battlefield.
And who am I, that they should fall for me?
My pride is dead; I cannot let thee go!

Offa. I am resolved! I think not I shall die
Though he be mighty. Lady, is it meet
That thou should'st kneel before a Saxon boy,
Around whose neck was once the hated ring
Of slavery? Princess of Normandy,
I love not to behold thee on thy knees.

Ros. O Offa, pity me! I cannot rise
Until thou call me "sister," noble heart,
Until the noble lips which spoke for me
So bravely greet me with a brother's kiss!
Then shall I know my folly is forgiv'n.

Offa. What folly, sister mine?

Ros. (rising). The shameful thought
That there should dwell, in God's free universe,
Two races, one the master, one the slave:

Two nations, one for honour, one for scorn.
 We have been fellow villeins. I was serf
 To ignorance.

Enter Ena with a horn of water in her hand.

Offa. But now we both are free.

Ros. Yes, we are free, but I have suffered much,
 And still must suffer. Brother, let me go
 And carry water to a wounded knight,
 Whom I have injured. I will go alone.
 I pray thee, Ena, bring the drinking-horn.
 I thank thee. Orienta sleepeth still.
 Speak I not truly?

Ena. Truly, my princess.

Ros. Call me not that. I shall be back anon.
 Take care of her who careth for us all,
 Until my coming, and rejoice to think
 Thou hast no friend-upon this battle-field.

Curtain.

ACT III.

SCENE I. The open country near Evesham. Leicester's camp close by. Moonlight. The evening before the battle. Enter DE MONTFORT and HEREWARD TORFRIDASSON from opposite sides.

De M. Sir Hereward, thou dost rejoice my heart
With the glad sight of thee. Upon thy face
Is written large "Devotion to the Cause—
The Cause of Righteousness." I welcome thee
Safe back from France, in time to see the fight
Which is impending.

Her. To take part therein,
Not stand here idle all the day, while thou
Art fighting for the people, heart and hand.

De M. It is well spoken. I have ever loved
To call myself the people's champion-knight,
And from their mouths there comes a single voice,
Complaining of the falseness of the king.
There is a might in such a multitude
Of witnesses which overthrows the thrones
Of petty princes. I had liefer be
The darling of the people, outlawed, poor
(Like thy great ancestor whose name thou bear'st),
Than sitting far above them, and beyond
Their love but not their hatred, clad in robes
Of finest linen, with a golden chain
Around my neck. I could not live like that,
Though all the world were perfect, and the need
Of warfare, like a cloud of choking dust,
Had passed, and we could breathe pure air again.

Her. I sometimes fear that time will never be ;
Yet fight I, that reproaches be not mine,
If England miss her truest destiny.

De M. I trust she will not. I have heavy cares,
As thou shalt hear. But be not sad at heart.

I doubt not that these things shall come to pass
 Before the end ; though whether in our time,
 And whether we shall see it with our eyes,
 We none of us can tell. It may be not :
 Yet will we struggle on, as thou hast said,
 That all posterity may say of us :—
 “ They made more worthy our inheritance,
 They gave us our most cherished liberties ! ”

Her. Lover of freedom : they shall say of thee :—
 “ We owe him more than all our sweetest songs
 Can sing of, or our dearest love repay !
 Since Harold died at Senlac, we had been
 As deaf and dumb, in matters of the state,
 Until De Montfort, seeing what was right,
 Made common cause with us. He raised his hand,
 Commanding those within the Senate House
 To open wide its portals, so that we
 Might enter in and tell our grievances.”

De M. In parliament we were victorious,
 In our first battle too ; but afterwards,
 The prince, who was our prisoner, escaped,
 And then it was that my distrust began.

Her. Distrust of what, De Montfort ? Not the Cause
 Full well I know, nor yet the people’s love.

De M. Nay, not the Cause. I never shall distrust
 The whiteness of the cross of this crusade !
 Nor yet the love of those who have been called
 The multitude, “ the rabble,” in contempt
 By lofty ones, who are not half so true.
 I have unbounded confidence in them,
 My humbler followers, but faithlessness
 Looks higher than the serfs and burgesses,
 In ventures such as this. Her votary
 Is one whom thou dost wot of.

Her. Can it be
 The Duke of Gloucester ? I have feared it long.

De M. I also feared, when Edward slipped away
So easily, that traitors in the camp,
Or one great traitor in the council-room,
Had helped him to his freedom. Still, I spoke
No word of censure, hoping I was wrong.
That may be as it may be. In the face
Of late events I cannot but suspect.

Her. What late events? Forget not, noble Earl,
I am as one who is a stranger here.
Thine errand, bearing me from England's shore,
Hath left me ignorant of many things.

De M. Ay, verily. 'Tis passing strange to me
To tell thee of the victory we won
A year ago, at Lewes; of the king,
A captive in our hands; of his young son,
Made hostage for him that he might go free;
Of Edward's flight; of the uncertainty
Concerning Gloucester which has haunted me
All through the war. So much has come to pass,
It seems a dozen years since our farewell,
Although, in truth, I think it is but one.

Enter Offa with a letter.

Offa. Which is the Earl of Leicester?

De M. I am he.

Offa. Most noble sir, I pray thee that thou read
This letter quickly. I was hindered much
In coming. The princess will die of grief,
If I arrive too late to succour thee.

De M. So she hath written—Princess Eleanor,
My best beloved! Hereward, I crave
Indulgence. 'Tis a letter from my wife.

Offa. Nay, not from her! Another woman's heart
Is in this struggle. Read, I pray thee. Read!
And let the message tell from whom it comes.

De M. I will. A woman sendeth news? 'Tis strange.
(reads) "Rosamund, at one time of the king's household at Winchester, unto Sir Simon de Montfort, Earl of Leicester, homage and greeting! The heart of Gloucester is not whole towards thee. Words of treachery fall from his lips. At Lewes he would have worked thy ruin, save that the heavens were too strong for him. He maketh to himself friends of the enemy, that, when he hath lost thy cause, they may salute him. His thoughts are even as the darkness, where there is no light at all. Unwittingly he hath revealed them unto me."

"He hath said that the Barons look not with trust upon her who was ward to Henry. Nevertheless, I entreat thee, pay heed unto this warning, for treachery dealeth in soft words and poisoned weapons. Would that I were other than I am. Would that I had a man's strong arm wherewith to strike a blow, on the side of Righteousness and Truth! I was near thee at Lewes. Perchance I shall also be near thee when the clash of arms is heard again. Be that as it may, my prayers shall follow thee! The God of Battles prosper thee! Farewell!"

"Written in the Temple of Security, in the year of our Lord twelve hundred and sixty-five, and sent by the hand of my brother, Offa Offasson, once slave to Gloucester."

De M. Tell thou fair Rosamund I kiss her hands,
 And thank her for her warning.

Her. Rosamund!

De M. Yea, the fair maid of Winchester, whose fame,
 These two or three years since, was noised abroad
 Because of her great daring. She had been
 As Henry's daughter, ruling at the court
 By beauty and a winning wilfulness.
 There came a day when her accustomed place
 No longer knew her. She had disappeared.
 No more she queened it at the tournament.
 No more there strove together gallant knights,
 To win her smile. No more the agéd king,

Who is most kindly (give him all his due)
Was cheered by her bright presence. She had gone,
And with her went De Warrenne, who had been
Her tutor. They were seen at Westminster,
That morning that the Charter was confirmed.

Her. I know they were. I spoke with them awhile.

De M. Thou, also? Art thou numbered with her
friends?

Her. I cannot tell. I wore her favour once;
But she denied my right to keep it still;
And so I gave the treasured ribbon back,
As we stood there together, by the Thames.
I have not since beheld her, nor again
Have lady's colours floated from my casque.

De M. And wherefore did the Lady Rosamund
Demand her ribbon?

Her. I remember well
The words she uttered by the riverside:—
“Thou art a Saxon, with a Saxon heart,
And I am Norman, and a Norman's ward.”
I think she had not spoken thus if I
Had not been named the special champion-knight
Of my own nation.

De M. Maybe she hath learnt
New lessons in her solitude. Her words
Are not the words of one whose life is ruled
By prejudice and hatred. Read and see!
Note well—“My brother, Offa Offasson,
Who once was slave to Gloucester.” She hath changed,
According to thy saying, if she call
A some-time villein “brother.”

Leicester gives the letter to Hereward, who turns aside to read it

De M. (to Offa). Boy, approach.
Thou comest from afar, and thou art tired.
My tent is near. Take thou this signet ring,

And seek admittance there, and thou shalt find
 Refreshment and a peaceful bed of straw,
 Whereon to rest thy weary limbs awhile.
 Perchance, before the morning, thou shalt wake
 To battle music. Take a brief repose,
 While quiet hovers o'er the sleeping camp.

Offa. Sir, thou art good to all except thyself,
 Who art the noblest ! If the earnest words
 Of his most humble lover could persuade
 Lord Leicester that he standeth much in need
 Of the strength-giver he hath offered me,
 I should rejoice.

De M. We live not to ourselves.
 A leader sleeps not on the battle eve.
 I take no rest till I lie down upon
 A bed of laurel ; or, if battle winds
 Should blow against me and should prove too strong
 For me, I shall have time enough to sleep.

Her. De Montfort, I beseech thee, speak not so !

De M. I will not if it grieve thee. *Offa*, say,
 How are the roads ? Was anything amiss
 When thou didst pass my castle ?

Offa. All is well.
 As I came by thy stronghold, Kenilworth,
 I caught the gleam of armour. Many men
 Will leave that fortress to join hands with thee,
 I doubt not.

De M. Yes, methinks my son is there.
 I trust he will not tarry. Go, my boy,
 The night soon spends itself. (*Exit Offa.*)
 (*To Hereward.*) What thinkest thou
 Of what thy lady-love hath written me ?

Her. She hath grown nobler and more lovable.

De M. Ay, she hath changed. O Hereward ! my heart
 Is ever aching at the deadly hate
 Of these two nations ! 'Twas a cruel wound

The conqueror inflicted ; yet, I trust
 This very war is working for its cure.
 See how they follow me—a foreigner,
 The Norman baron and the Saxon serf !
 Race hatred is the ruin of the world.
 Give me thy word that thou and Rosamund,
 If ye do find each other, evermore
 Will labour for the healing of this scar.

Her. (laying his hand upon his sword-hilt).
 I promise thee. My hope has come again,
 My hope of winning her, and bringing her
 To hear thy voice and look upon thy face.

De M. I trust that day will come ; and now, farewell !

Her. Good-night ! And may we meet again in peace !

De M. Amen ! But one more word before we part.
 I am but servant of a mighty Cause.
 It may be that this struggle will not end
 For many centuries. I conjure thee,
 If I should fall to-morrow, not to think
 That God deserteth you, or that His arm
 Is shortened, that it cannot save you still.
 The people are His special charge. He speaks
 At seasons by their voice ; and He will guard
 Their rights most jealously and bring them through,
 Though many foes encompass them. Farewell !

Curtain.

SCENE II. The same. The next morning. The battle of Evesham is now drawing to a close. LEICESTER is expecting reinforcements from Kenilworth. Great din of battle. Alarums and excursions. Parties of soldiers pass. Enter ORIENTA.

Ori. (alone). I cannot find her. I would give my ears
 To have my eyes again, and look for her.
 I well could spare the hearing of this strife.
 My eyes of understanding must be blind
 Like those of this poor body. When she fled,

I knew her for the maiden I had sought.
 What irony! that I should lose her now,
 Whom many years I watched and waited for!
 That she should kneel beside me in the cave,
 While, all unwittingly, I told to her
 The story of her mother's life and death.
 When she had gone, and Offa told me all—
 Her message, what the Duke of Gloucester said,
 Her sorrow for her lover, what had chanced—
 With sorrow and regret there came to me
 Remembrance of a thousand little things
 Which might have told me who the damsel was.
 I felt again the trembling of her hand,
 The heaving of her bosom; heard again
 Her stifled exclamation as I spoke
 The name of Adela, and afterwards
 Her sighing, as I told her mother's wish
 Concerning Rosamund and Norman pride.

Enter De Montfort and Hereward.

De M. Good dame, whom seekest thou, amidst the din
 Of battle? I must onward! Get thee hence!
 This is no place for women! Thou art blind?
 I pity thee. I pray thee, stand aside.
 Bethink thee of thy safety! Yonder stands
 A convent. I will send a trusty youth
 To guide thee to the shelter of its walls.
 On, Hereward! And God be with us yet.

Exit De Montfort.

Her. I follow, leader mine, to life or death!
 For Leicester and the Cause!

Ori. (detaining Hereward). Sir Hereward!

Her. Hence, mother! What have I to do with thee?

Ori. My son, in pity say if thou art he
 Who loveth Rosamund of Winchester.

Her. I am. Where is she now? What news of her?

Ori. No news. I seek her here. She mourneth thee
As slain at Lewes. She hath left my home,
I know not wherefore, save that she might come
To warn the righteous Earl of treachery.

Her. That well may be. 'Twould be like Rosamund.
The Heavens keep her ! Leicester hath received
Her letter, and it touched him to the heart.
If it be possible, if there should be
A calmer moment, I will speak with him
About thy search for her ; for well I know
He taketh kindly interest in her.

Ori. I doubt not, if he have a grateful heart :
For she is full of hero-love for him,
And risketh much to serve him. Someone passed
Awhile ago, and spoke of convent walls.

Her. De Montfort's self, who paused to do a deed
Of chivalry. It ever was his way.

Ori. I marvel not the people hold him dear.

Her. Nor I. Right joyfully I follow him.
I must away, I dare not linger here.

Exit Sir Hereward.

Ori. How long must I await my dear one's child ?
O Adela ! To think that I should live
To search the field of battle, and to seek
Thy daughter in the midst of mortal strife !

Enter Offa, in search of Orienta.

Offa. Revered protectress, I would bring to thee
Protection !

Ori. Offa, is it truly thou—
So long a stranger and a wanderer ?
I deemed thee in the Duke of Gloucester's pow'r,
And sorrowed.

Offa. Nay, I suffered nought by him.
He would not keep his tryst. He scorned to meet
In daylight, and in honest fight, the son
Of one he had oppressed.

Ori. O happiness!
Thank God! Perchance my children, all of them,
Will come again, and I shall be alone
And desolate no longer. Thou, indeed,
Art first, and after, cometh Rosamund!

Offa. Dear Orienta, prithee come away
From danger. I am sent thee by the Earl,
To guide thee into safety. Quickly, come!

Trying to lead her away, he stops with a gesture of despair.

Alas! it is too late! We cannot pass.
The way is blocked—escape impossible!

Ori. I am not sorry. Maybe, Rosamund
Will find us here more easily. If she
Hath heard by any chance that Hereward
Is still among the living, she will come.
I feel it, for she never was the maid
To weep within a peaceful nunnery
And leave her lover on the battlefield.

*Orienta is sitting on the trunk of a fallen tree. Offa stands on a hillock
and looks toward the battlefield.*

Offa. I see a host approach from Kenilworth! '
They bear Lord Leicester's banners! 'Tis his son,
Who leads them to the succour of his sire!
De Montfort looks toward them, and his face
Lights up with joy. Oh! horror! What is this?
A change! confusion! All things are not well.
Our leader's countenance grows dark again.
I cannot tell what evil threatens them.
The field is in disorder.

Ori. Look again.

Offa. I do not cease from looking. On they come!
 These friends are foes, who bear the Baron's flag,
 Which they have captured! Leicester's fate is fixed!
 The righteous Earl defeated cannot live!

Ori. I know it. Who leads on the enemy?

Offa. False Gloucester! He who challenged me to
 fight

And then repented, saying that he scorned
 To slay his father's vellein. Not a man
 In England or in Normandy can match
 This Duke in falseness! How he hates the Earl!
 He rushes to attack him! Leicester turns
 His noble head, and speaks inspiring words
 To those that follow him. I hear a shout.
 I see a dagger flashing in the air!
 I see a struggle! Those two mighty ones
 Are locked together—treachery and truth
 In deadly strife! Sir Hereward is there!
 He stands beside De Montfort. Someone falls!
 My sight is dazed. O Heavens!! 'Tis the Earl!!
 No more! No more! I cannot look again!

Ori. I could not ask thee, child.

Enter Rosamund in great agitation. She throws herself into Orienta's arms.

Ros. At last! At last!
 O Orienta! Shield me with thine arms—
 Thy mother arms! And hold me to thy heart,
 And save me from this terror, lest I die!

Ori. My daughter, my belovéd, it will pass;
 This grief endureth but a little while!

Ros. De Montfort, he hath fallen!

Ori. Yea, my own;
 But he himself would be the last to say
 His death had lost the Cause of Righteousness.

Ros. So noble, and to die by such a hand!

Ori. Too noble, we might say, to die at all.
 We know not what is best. The righteous fall :
 The wicked stand above them, triumphing.
 Young hearts are well-nigh broken by the thought
 Of all these things ; but those whose lives have seen
 Such changes as my own, are very sure
 That in the dawning future, Nemesis
 Will overtake the slayers of the just.

Ros. And what is retribution ? Can it bring
 The mighty dead again ? Can it undo
 Injustice, and the ruin of the great ?

Ori. I think there is no ruin for a life
 That ends in honour, be it sad or no.

Ros. I will not cast away thy comforting,
 Although I tremble still, and still it seems
 Piteous and cruel that oft the bravest men
 Should suffer at the bidding of the worst.

Ori. This shall not always be. I look and long
 For justice, in the great Hereafter-time ;
 For overthrow of those who made the wrong ;
 For restitution to the innocent ;
 For unforbidden friendship with the brave,
 Whom here we only worship from afar ;
 So grieve no more for Leicester. Thou hast done
 Thy best to serve him. Doubt not, thou shalt see
 Thy hero, in the days that are to be.

Offa. Dear sister, we are seldom quite so strong
 As we would wish to be ; and thou hast borne
 Much sorrow. Canst thou also bear to hear
 Good news, a tale that tells of hopefulness ?

Ros. Of hope ? Why, yes. The Earl would bid us hope,
 And I will hear thee, after I have said
 Some words I should have spoken long ago.
 Good friend, a story thou didst once relate
 Of Princess Adela and Rosamund,
 Her baby, born in far Jerusalem.
 What if I were this Rosamund myself ?

Ori. I knew it. I was filled with such despair,
When my heart's daughter fled away from me,
That Offa told me everything he heard.

Ros. And art thou glad?

Ori. My little one, my life
Will end in sunshine, if I live to see
Thy mother's wish fulfilled, the ribbon badge
Of this fair Norman in a Saxon's casque.

Ros. That cannot be. The only Saxon knight
Who ever asked my favour—Hereward,
Descendant of the daughter of "The Wake,"
Was slain at Lewes, fighting for the Earl,
For whom he bore a most adoring love.
O mother Orienta! 'Twas my pride
That parted us! I love him—and too late!

She kneels, sobbing, by Orienta.

Offa. Nay, hear me! It was Gloucester's false report
Which made thee search the temple hill for one
Who was not there, but safe and well in France.
Sir Hereward yet lives! I spoke with him
But yesterday, and not an hour ago
I saw him. He will come to comfort thee.

Enter Sir Hereward.

Her. Yea, Offa, thou art right and I *have* come
To comfort her. Look up, my lady-love,
And see that I am with thee in the flesh,
Thy servant!

Ros. Nay, my lord, my prince, my king!
Forgive me! O forgive me!—if, indeed,
Thou dost not now despise me, and believe
That I have also suffered; for my words
To thee have been my torture, day and night.
An it delight thee, take my badge again,
'Tis thine, and I am thine, for evermore

Her. Fair Rosamund, if there were aught amiss,
It is forgotten. I remember well
Thou said'st—"In time of battle we shall meet,
And give each other greeting." It was true.
In time of battle, too, we plight our troth.
I would I had a ring to symbolise
Our contract!

Offa. Take De Montfort's signet ring,
Last night he placed it in my hands himself.
To-day thou canst not find a fitter sign
Of thy betrothal.

Ori. (*To Rosamund.*) Just a moment, pause!
My little one, although to Hereward
No riches come with thee from England's king,
Thou art not portionless. We were of old
A wealthy family in Palestine;
And when, for love of Thomas Becket's sire,
The maiden I was taught to look upon
As foundress of our house forsook her land,
And left her sire lamenting, she was forced
To lose her dowry, and her priceless gems.
These jewels and this gold I give to thee,
According to a promise which I made
Thy mother. 'Twas the treasure Gloucester sought.
Not finding it, he was obliged to buy
His pardon through the favour of the prince.
(*To Hereward.*) My son, this England is no place for thee.
Although, for love of Rosamund, the king
Might spare thee, Leicester's follower, methinks,
Would deem such grace dishonour; therefore, seek
A rest from all this strife in Normandy.

Her. We thank thee, Orienta. Times will change,
And Justice, from the ashes of the brave,
Another Phoenix, rise to newer strength.
There never was a battle wholly lost,
Where right and truth made any stand at all!
There never was a hero lived in vain!
De Montfort wieldeth yet a mighty pow'r.

He said that, if he fell, we must not think
 That God deserted us, or that His arm
 Was shortened, that It could not save us still.
 'Twas nobly spoken, and his last command
 Shall rule our lives, and bring a healing hope
 To both of us, who with this relic bind
 Our hearts together. Rosamund, a word—
 Art thou content?

*He raises Rosamund's left hand, and puts De Montfort's ring on her
 finger.*

Ros. I am content. I see
 The Norman and the Saxon, one in love,
 Two nations, by a covenant of peace
 United. Lo! Thy people evermore
 Shall be my people, and thy land shall be
 My country, till the countries pass away!

Curtain.

Christmas, 1899.



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